

I am a school supervisor at a kindergarten in Kowloon. I have the following views and opinions in regard of the Kindergarten Voucher Scheme.

My question on the implement of the Kindergarten Voucher Scheme is two-fold. First, is the Voucher Scheme aiming to help the financially needed families (like low income families) with kindergarten age children to have equal opportunities for their kindergarten age children to receive pre-school education? Or secondly, is the Voucher Scheme aiming to promote all 2 to 5 year-olds to attend pre-school/kindergarten because of the importance of pre-school education to our very young children by giving out financial subsidy to all eligible pre-school age children as an incentive?

I believe that the Voucher Scheme is NOT effective because the objective of the Voucher Scheme is not clearly defined. It is not helping the truly financially needed families with kindergarten age children nor helping to send out the clear message that all pre-school/kindergarten age children ought to attend pre-school because the first 4-year pre-school education is very important in early childhood development.

The Voucher Scheme was put out hastily without proper planning, research and studied, overlooking objectives, reasoning, benefits, and negative effects which created many associating problems. Here are some of the more important problems:

1. The implement of the Voucher Scheme stifles the healthy and normal competition which is much needed for maintaining the high quality of early childhood (pre-school/kindergarten) education. The Voucher Scheme is definitely unfair.
 - a. We have to participate in the Voucher Scheme because we are forced to do that in order to survive because of the location of our kindergarten, family profile of our kindergarten children, and what we have been servicing the neighborhood in the past 45 years. What's wrong that we want to go on doing what we are best at, running kindergarten education service in the familiar neighborhood because we have the experience and the heart to

continue doing what we are best at? Having to participate in the Voucher Scheme, we are pressed with unreasonable requirements from the government and receiving many associating problems which the Voucher Scheme has brought in. These problems are disrupting what we have been doing at our best in the past decades.

- b. The Voucher Scheme subsidy is not a complete subsidy, it is only partial subsidy but the Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens are treated as if they were taking the full advantage of a full voucher subsidy. The voucher subsidy amount is only for partial monthly school fees. The kindergartens are responsible for the complete overall operating costs which are covered by the school fee incomes, but the voucher subsidy alone cannot cover all the operating costs so these kindergartens cannot provide a \$0 school fees with just the voucher subsidy money. Therefore, the current implemented Voucher Scheme subsidy is NOT a full subsidy scheme and should NOT be treated as if it were a full subsidy scheme.
- c. With only partial subsidy, the government believes its subsidy is as if it were a full subsidy stipulating all kinds of unfair and unreasonable requirements on kindergartens which are participating in the Voucher Scheme. Take the teacher certification requirement for example, it demands an across-the-line requirement of hiring 100% QKT/CE teachers for the Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens but yet remains highly flexible (not 100% QKT/CE hiring, any foreign hiring, mix background hiring) for other non-Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens. With such requirements for those Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens, the government should then provide a list of available QKT/CE teachers for hire and stop the QKT/CE certified kindergarten teacher 'shortage' (the QKT/CE certified kindergarten teacher 'shortage' problems are discussed below).

- d. The government should understand that the Voucher Scheme has created an awkward and lopsided kindergarten teachers (QKT/CE or others) hiring situation; many what used to be full time from all regions kindergarten teachers are lured away by unjustifiable high salary paid by private expensive kindergartens or large government subsidized chained organizations. Others are lured away by working as non-committing high paying substitution teachers, leaving kindergartens like ours stranded and unable to hire any required QKT/CE certified and committed full time kindergarten teachers because there is no way we can afford such unfairly jacked up unjustifiable salary with the partial subsidy that we get from the Voucher Scheme; or simply, those teachers are not willing to work in kindergartens with conditions like ours. Furthermore, we have been pressed with requirements which we have to meet as if we were fully government subsidized kindergartens and also have to compete unfairly with other more advantageous kindergartens or organizations. If at one point we get subsidy from the Voucher Scheme while at the other point we have to raise the part of the school fees so that parents have to pay more to help pay the much higher teachers' salary, this is saying that the Voucher Scheme is really NOT functioning at its objective (if there is any objective) – that is not helping parents financially to put their kindergarten age children receive pre-school education. On the contrary, the Voucher Scheme has increased the parents' burden on payment their kindergarten age children go through 3 years of kindergarten. So, is the Voucher Scheme helping or not?
- e. How could a non-profit making kindergarten receiving partial Voucher Scheme subsidy continue operating under 1, High salary QKT/CE teachers; 2, Unfair, stringent and unreasonable teacher qualification requirement and other requirements; 3, Unfair and unhealthy competition; 4, being treated by the government as if the kindergarten was an fully government subsidized school.

2. The situation is private/international expensive kindergartens (like the ones charging \$3000-5000 monthly school fees) have exceptionally high enrollment continuously, indicating that it is really questionable that the Voucher Scheme is needed to truly help the truly needed ones. While many Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens like ours are struggling to survive with problems of insufficient enrollments and unjustifiable high paying QKT/CE kindergarten teachers.
 - a. These private non-Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens have higher income, so they lured away kindergarten teachers with much higher salary;
 - b. Besides, these kindergartens have a much more relaxed and flexible teacher qualification requirement and other limited requirements; it is not a fair practice by the government.
 - c. Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens like ours receive only partial voucher subsidy but are pressed with strict, stringent and unreasonable requirements as if we were fully government subsidized kindergartens.

3. Why must Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens receiving partial subsidy hire 100% QKT/CE teachers while other private/international expensive non-Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens which have much higher enrollments could hire almost anyone they want. Isn't it the quality of early childhood education is directly determined by how well and how sincere the teaching staff can teach but not by whether the teacher is QKT or CE? How does QKT or CE warrant such certified teachers perform quality early childhood education?
 - a. QKT/CE teachers have become more practical and work for private/international expensive kindergartens or as non-committing substitution teachers because they know their certification credential can get them much higher salary. While

other academically and personality qualified who really have the heart in teaching kindergarten children are denied of their true teaching desires which could be truly benefiting kindergarten children; isn't it the true meaning of early-childhood education?

- b. Why can private/international expensive kindergartens hire almost anyone (local QKT/CE, university graduates in any field, foreigners with mix qualification and background) as kindergarten teachers, while kindergartens like ours have to have 100% QKT/CE?
- c. These private/international non-Voucher Scheme participating kindergartens could afford paying much higher salary because of high enrollments. They lured away many QKT/CE teachers and thus created a 'shortage'.
- d. Most importantly, the true quality of education at any kindergarten in the eyes of the early childhood educators and the children's parents is how well their children are being taken care of and taught regardless of the teachers who are QKT/CE certified or not. If parents believe that their children are not receiving quality education in their current kindergarten even with a full staff of QKT/CE certified teachers, they would still change school and report that to the Education Department. So what is the true meaning of the requirement for a 100% QKT/CE teachers? What does QKT/CE guarantee? Why can't the government allow healthy competition to happen among kindergartens so that they all have the common goal of working for the true quality early childhood education? The Education Department should be scrutinizing and documenting the qualification profile (personality and academic background) of the teachers whose data is supplied by the hiring kindergartens instead of just requiring across the board 100% QKT/CE teachers. What does QKT/CE certification teach that only people who studied QKT/CE can become kindergarten teachers but not other qualified ones?