

## Factors Affecting Parents' Choice of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong: An Exploratory Study

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**ABSTRACT:** *In Hong Kong, children's education has become an increasingly important issue for families; parents prefer to provide their children with early childhood education because it is vital for children's comprehensive development and lifelong learning (Cheung, 2019). While previous studies have focused on the influence of parents' socio-demographic factors and institutional factors on parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong (Fung & Lam, 2011; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009), few studies have looked into other factors such as birth order position of the child within the family and length of residency in Hong Kong. This quantitative research aims to investigate factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong. This paper summarizes factors that parents are concerned with while choosing a school, including parents' socio-demographic factors and institutional factors. Birth order position of the child within the family and length of residency in Hong Kong are also analyzed in this study. The sample consisted of 2000 parents whose children received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong. Data were collected via a self-administered questionnaire; descriptive analysis was used to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of sampling, and chi-square test and binary logistic regression were carried out to identify factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong. The statistical results reveal that family monthly income and birth order position of the child within the family are main factors affecting parents' choice, and school hardware and school background have a slightly significant trend with parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong.*

**KEYWORDS:** choice with school, early childhood education, Hong Kong, parents

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## INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong kindergarten education refers to the three-year kindergarten program for children aged 3 to 6 (Education Bureau, 2019). Although kindergarten education is not compulsory, most parents will send their children to participate in the program (Education Bureau, 2015); parents believe that early childhood education programs enable their children to develop good

habits and prepare them for high-quality primary education, which paves the way for success in the future (Cheung, 2019). Therefore, most parents prefer to provide their children with early childhood education, and preschool or kindergarten is the leading institution that parents choose.

Early childhood education has been given proper recognition for the first time in educational reform, with the role of early childhood education being acknowledged as the foundation for lifelong learning (Chan & Chan, 2003). Therefore, quality kindergarten education helps develop an interest in learning and exploration, promotes children's balanced development, and develops children's healthy self-concept and confidence (The Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address, 2018). In Hong Kong, preschool is expected to provide children with favourable conditions to become civilized, dynamic, and cultured cosmopolitan citizens (Audit Commission, 2013). Additionally, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has implemented a new kindergarten education policy starting from 2017-2018 with a substantial increase in government expenditure to enhance teachers' remuneration, reduce parents' financial burden, and improve teaching quality (The Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address, 2018).

In prior studies, some parents' socio-demographic factors and some institutional factors have already been studied and discovered that they influence parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong (Fung & Lam, 2011; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009): the parents' socio-demographic factors that have been studied include gender, age, education, employment status, occupation, and family monthly income (Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009), and the institutional factors include school background, school hardware, school software, and school performance (Fung & Lam, 2011). However, there is a dearth of research on birth order position of the child within the family and length of residency in Hong Kong. Despite the efforts made by researchers, the influence of birth order position of the child within the family and length of residency in Hong Kong remains mostly unknown to the Hong Kong early childhood education research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review focuses on factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong. The review also pays particular attention to various factors that parents take into consideration when choosing a school.

### **Parents' Choice of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong has established a relatively advanced education system in which parents have a wide range of early childhood education programmes' choices (Wong & Rao, 2015). Various studies have been conducted to evaluate the different factors involved in parental choices in children's kindergarten (Chan & Hung, 2015; Education Bureau, 2015; Fung & Lam, 2011; Lee et al., 2015; Leung, 2012; Opper, 1992; Rao et al., 2013; Wong & Rao, 2015; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). From these previous studies, institutional factors including school hardware

(Wong & Rao, 2015), school software (Fung & Lam, 2011), school background (Lee et al., 2015), and school performance (Leung, 2012) are regarded as important factors. To be specific, institutional factors include school location (the length of time to pick up children), school facilities (teaching equipment, etc.), teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.), school environment (pleasant), teaching methods and strategies, program offerings (half-day/full-day), home cooperation (frequently communicating with parents, actively following up with children), quality review: results and reports, school mission and vision, background of the kindergarten service provider, school organization and management team, primary school allocation for kindergarten graduates, network with other kindergartens and primary schools, children's academic achievement in the school, and parents' satisfaction with the school. It should also be noted that family conditions also explain parents' choices of early childhood education in Hong Kong to a large extent (Education Bureau, 2015). Firstly, family monthly income and occupation will influence the way a family attends to young children and their expectations from children (Chan & Hung, 2015). Such expectations can also be influenced by the birth order position of the child within the family and whether the family plans to stay in Hong Kong in the long run (Oppen, 1992). There were nonetheless a few studies on the connection between these two factors and parents' educational choices. Based on the data aggregated from a survey randomly distributed to cover as many social groups as possible, this quantitative research investigates how birth order position of the child within the family and length of residency in Hong Kong influence parents' deliberation over choices on offspring's early childhood education in Hong Kong. This study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) Do parents prefer non-profit-making kindergarten or private independent kindergarten for their children in Hong Kong?
- (2) What are significant factors that parents consider when deciding to choose early childhood education institutions for their children in Hong Kong?
- (3) How does birth order position of the child within the family affect parents' choice of the type of early childhood education school in Hong Kong?
- (4) How does length of residency in Hong Kong affect parents' choice of the type of early childhood education school in Hong Kong?

### **Factors that Affect Parents' Choice of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong**

The following summarized factors that parents are concerned with while choosing a school, including parents' socio-demographic factors and institutional factors.

#### **Parents' Socio-demographic Factors**

##### **Family Monthly Income**

Family monthly income is a factor that alters parents' choice of schools for their children. The choices that parents made based on their family monthly income sometimes cannot reveal their preferred school. There is an example provided in a study by Tam and Chan (2010), if parents cannot help their children with academic tasks due to a variety of limitations, some parents may choose a tutoring institution for their children. However, a tutoring institution is unaffordable

for parents with low family monthly income (Chan & Hung, 2015). As a result, parents with low family monthly income may choose schools that assist parents in tutoring homework.

#### Birth Order Position of the Child within the Family

Some families have only one child in Hong Kong, while others have two or more children (Oppen, 1992). Parents do have higher expectations of elder children, including their academic achievements and behaviors since they are considered an example by younger siblings. Their older siblings potentially influence younger children's actions and attitudes toward the study, as a result, some parents believe that providing the best education to the oldest child is a good start (Oppen, 1992). Therefore, different education may be offered a different child to different birth order positions within the family.

#### Length of Residency in Hong Kong

There are many different groups of people living in Hong Kong, including natives, immigrants from mainland China, and non-Chinese ethnic minorities (Wong & Rao, 2015). Due to their diverse background, people differ from each other in expectations of children's education. In a study conducted by Oppen (1994), parents' social network, family monthly income, languages, and cultural competences have effects on children's education; therefore, the length of residency in Hong Kong is a potential factor affecting parents' choice. The longer they live in Hong Kong, the more likely they agree with mainstream views on education. In this case, it is believed that the length of residency in Hong Kong affects parents' expectations of children's education, which means the period of residency may influence parents' choice of schools.

#### **Institutional Factors**

The institutional factors include school hardware (Wong & Rao, 2015), school software (Fung & Lam, 2011), school background (Lee et al., 2015), and school performance (Leung, 2012).

#### School Hardware

The school hardware (Wong & Rao, 2015) includes school location (the length of time to pick up children), school facilities (teaching equipment, etc.), teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.), and school environment (pleasant).

#### School Location (the Length of Time to Pick up Children)

Even though academic factors were believed to be a significant factor affecting parents' choice of schools, other evidence shows that parents have other non-academic concerns. According to a study conducted in 2011, researchers found that school location (the length of time to pick up children) is a factor that parents are concerned about (Fung & Lam, 2011); some parents also preferred related, safer locations that are easy to access, such as the ground floor of the building (Noble, 2007).

#### School Facilities (Teaching Equipment, etc.)

Some parents rate school facilities (Kaczan et al., 2014), including teaching equipment, furniture, classrooms, and playgrounds (Owoeye & Yara, 2011), as one factor that influences

their choice of school for their children (Chan & Yeung, 2017). The most frequently asked questions include: Are the equipments suitable for children to use? Is furniture new or old? Are there individual rooms for activities? Are there enough rooms for all the students? Is the playground spacious? Parents care if the school can provide an appropriate and safe environment for children to study and rest.

Teaching Level of Kindergarten Teachers (Teachers' Education Level, Professional Ability, etc.)

Children are usually curious, loud, and naughty from age 3 to 6 (Dyer et al., 2000); therefore, the staff with more experience can calm them and maintain order during some complicated situations. For example, they should treat the children calmly without yelling at them. The quality of teaching includes teachers' education level and professional ability (Yaacob et al., 2014): a teacher with teaching training may know more teaching methods to meet children's needs (Hakim, 2015), and an experienced teacher may know more about getting along well with children (Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009), especially keeping children calm and organized, curious children always have some questions; also, a good teacher should always be patient with children who show great curiosity. Overall, the quality of all staff, including teachers, is an essential factor to observe before choosing a preschool.

School Environment (Pleasant)

A pleasant school environment, such as location, facilities, and decorations, is a favorable factor while choosing preschools for children (Ng et al., 2017). While most parents prefer schools located downtown, some parents prefer schools located far from the city center (Rao et al., 2013). The school environment is more pleasant with more spaces, playing facilities, and decorations, to some extent, parents may prefer schools with simple decorations because they think those are more suitable for their children (Siriboe & Harfitt, 2017).

School Software

The school software (Fung & Lam, 2011) includes teaching methods and strategies, program offerings (half-day/full-day), home cooperation (frequently communicating with parents, actively following up with children), and quality review: results and reports.

Teaching Methods and Strategies

Teaching methods and strategies facilitate children's learning effectiveness. In preschools, an engaging teaching strategy can trigger children's interest in studying (Education Department, 2006). It is essential to know if children are engaged, and if course contents meet children's interests and needs, therefore, teaching methods and strategies are a necessary factor that parents consider while choosing schools.

Program Offerings (Half-day/Full-day)

As shown in the study by Fung and Lam (2011), parents' choice of preschools was also influenced by program offerings; there are two main types of programs provided by the majority of kindergartens in Hong Kong: half-day and full-day program (Ng et al., 2017). Parents with

busy work schedules tend to choose schools that provide a full-day program (Fung & Lam, 2011), which is seen by parents as the best choice because it fits their schedule.

#### Home Cooperation (Frequently Communicating with Parents, Actively Following up with Children)

A study showed that parents have trouble with involvement in homework (Güzel, 2017). Most parents believe that homework is necessary for children, but they need a balance between schoolwork and children's interests. In order to push children to do homework, some parents tutor their children by themselves, and some parents pay for tutorial classes to assist their children (Güzel, 2017). In the case where parents tutor their children, there are some problems: some parents may have trouble solving their children's issues, and the relationship between parents and children may have negative changes due to the arguments; therefore, direct parents' involvement in homework was considered ineffective (Güzel, 2017). Indirect parent involvement is sometimes not affordable in some families, as a result, a school with good communication with parents is considered helpful for some families (Güzel, 2017). Therefore, when parents choose schools, home cooperation (frequently communicating with parents, actively following up with children) can be a factor that some parents are concerned about depending on their family situations.

#### Quality Review: Results and Reports

Some parents prefer schools with good quality reviews, so if the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region can provide reports and feedback frequently, parents can have a better view of what their children learned in school. A prior study investigated by Opper (1994) showed that parents expect kindergarten to prepare children for primary school by learning the skills they will learn in Grade 1. Therefore, providing feedback and results is a potential factor that parents are concerned about when choosing a preschool for their children.

#### School Background

The school background (Lee et al., 2015) includes school mission and vision, background of the kindergarten service provider, and school organization and management team.

#### School Mission and Vision

Concerning the future, parents would prefer a school with a clear mission and vision (Fung & Lam, 2012). For example, a school that guarantees a smooth transition can provide a piece of information to parents: the students in this preschool are guaranteed a specific school seat; however, some schools are more focused on triggering children's interests (Cheung, 2019). Therefore, before choosing a preschool, it is better to know the mission and vision to know if the plans meet their own needs.

#### Background of the Kindergarten Service Provider

The background of the kindergarten service provider is a non-academic factor that parents are concerned about (Postiglione & Lee, 1997), parents are interested in knowing whether the service provider is caring or not. Even though every school advertises that they are caring,

parents gather such information through comments from experiences or through observations: most common observations include “Does the school offer fresh snacks?” and “Is the food cooked by the school cook?” (Wechsler et al., 2001). Parents are always concerned with work and family-related issues, and these concerns bring stress, with a responsible and caring service provider, parents can worry less after sending children to preschool, and they can release part of their stress through it.

#### School Organization and Management Team

Similar to the background of the kindergarten service provider, parents are concerned if the school team is caring and responsible. Children in school are not only in contact with teachers and classmates, but also some other employees such as cleaners (Choi, 2006). It is necessary to know if employees recruited in the school team are caring for children, thus, friendly and responsible school management is a factor that parents prefer while choosing schools.

#### School Performance

The school performance (Leung, 2012) includes primary school allocation for kindergarten graduates, network with other kindergartens and primary schools, children’s academic achievement in the school, and parents’ satisfaction with the school.

#### Primary School Allocation for Kindergarten Graduates

Providing children with excellent academic preparation is one of the main reasons to set up preschools. According to a prior study, some parents stated that they chose a preschool because that school was able to secure their children in a primary school after graduation (Fung & Lam, 2011). Suppose preschools have records of where their graduates were placed, in that case, parents may tend to choose the one with a satisfying record, which means they can provide children with better preparation before enrolling in primary school.

#### Network with other Kindergartens and Primary Schools

Some parents believe that preschools not only prepare children academically but also in some non-academic aspects (Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). A school with a good network can hold activities with other schools so that children have more opportunities to make more friends (Siriboe & Harfitt, 2017). Parents who believe that social networking is essential may prefer this kind of school, a school with a good network can gather more resources and information from primary schools so that they can provide children with extra preparation before enrolling in primary schools (Education Department, 2006).

### Children's Academic Achievement in the School

As shown in a prior study, children's academic achievement in the school was rated as one of the most critical factors parents are concerned about (Lee et al., 2015). Students can learn more efficiently with excellent communication skills, some parents prefer schools providing language training, including both Mandarin and English (Leung et al., 2005). In addition, most parents also prefer schools teaching primary school curricula so that their children can transit to primary school smoothly (Leung, 2012). As shown in previous studies, parents prefer to make sure that their children are academically ready before moving to primary school in Hong Kong (Cheung, 2019; Dyer et al., 2000; Opper, 1994).

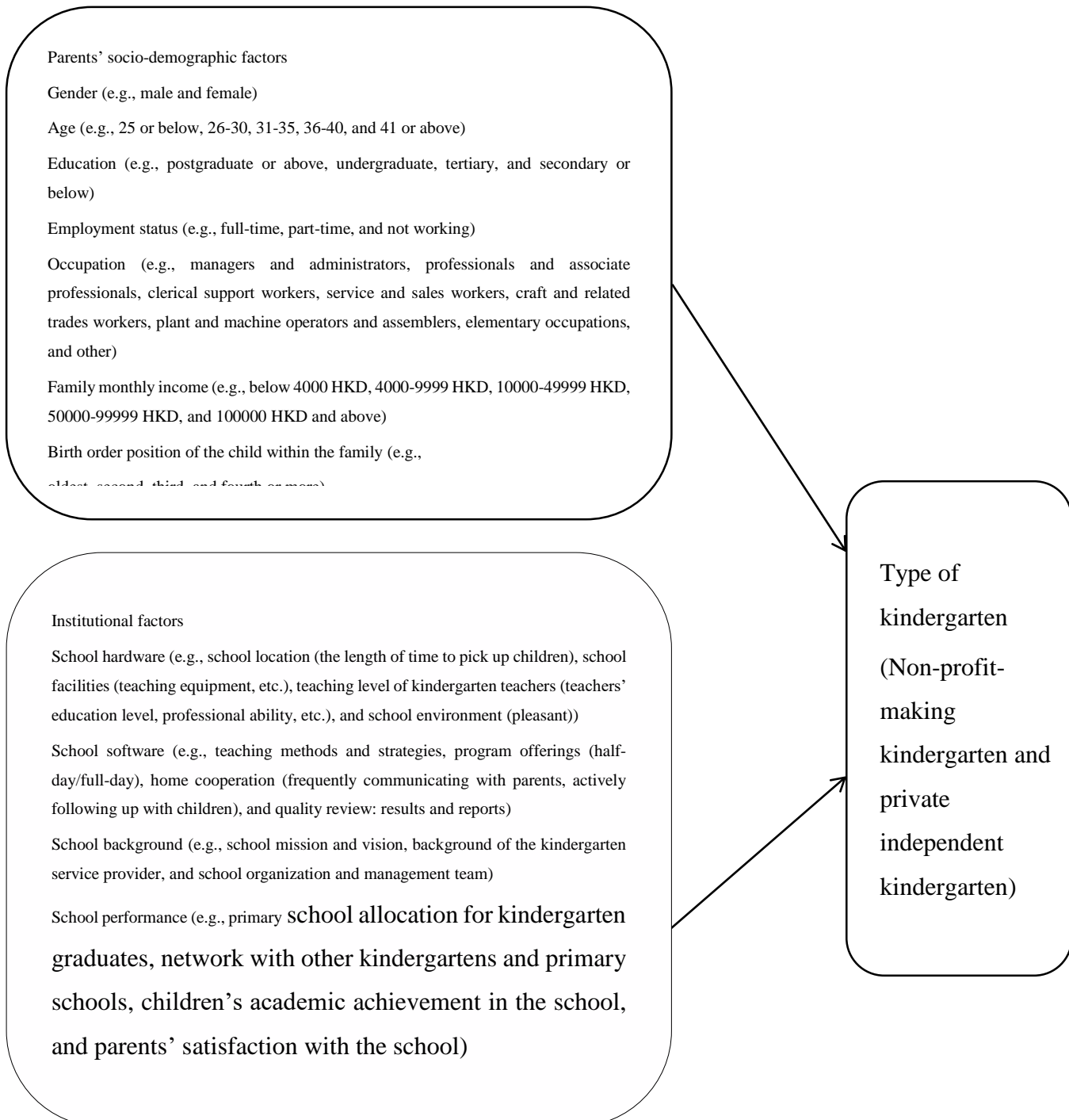
### Parents' Satisfaction with the School

Parents' satisfaction with the school varies among different individuals (Kaczan et al., 2014): some parents are more concerned about academic factors than non-academic factors (Godwin et al., 1998), but other parents may think non-academic factors are more important when choosing the preschool (Friedman et al., 2007). It is difficult for a school to satisfy all parents, so parents' satisfaction with the school is sometimes not a valid factor in choosing schools. However, the comments from the upper years are still useful: if the school's satisfaction level is overall low, parents are less likely to choose that school (Cheung, 2019); instead, parents would like to choose a school with more positive comments on satisfaction (Cheung, 2019).

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this quantitative research took into consideration all possible factors from the literature to derive dependent variable and independent variables for data analysis. The dependent variable is the type of kindergarten that parents choose and the factors (including parents' socio-demographic factors and institutional factors) that may affect parents' choice of early childhood education institutions for their children constitute the independent variables. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Factors Affecting Parents' Choice of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong.





**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Framework of Factors Affecting Parents' Choice of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong*

## **METHODOLOGY**

According to Hong Kong early childhood education researchers, a quantitative research method study is a promising direction for future Hong Kong early childhood education research; hence, this method merits academic attention (Hakim, 2015). Therefore, the quantitative research method was chosen for this study to utilize factor analysis to analyze factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong, as it has particular value in achieving an elaborate and comprehensive understanding of complex topics within an educational context (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). This research looked into factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong by using a self-administered questionnaire.

### **Questionnaire**

The quantitative research used the factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong questionnaire that a supervisor checked and were pre-tested by 200 parents whose children received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong. The questionnaires were available in English and traditional Chinese for the parents to fully understand the survey questions and provide a valid response as shown in Appendix A and Appendix B, all parents could choose which version they were comfortable with. The questionnaire consisted of two parts as detailed below:

#### **Part (a) Parents' Socio-demographic Factors**

The questionnaire contained questions based on parents' gender, age, education, employment status, occupation, and family monthly income. A question was set to ask what type of kindergarten parents would like to send their children to test whether birth order position of the child within the family and length of residency in Hong Kong alter parents' choice of preschools.

#### **Part (b) Institutional Factors**

The questions in this questionnaire are based on essential institutional factors that parents are concerned about when they choose early childhood education institutions for their children in Hong Kong, all these factors are proven in previous researches, and there are four institutional factors: school hardware, school software, school background, and school performance.

### **Sampling**

The sample for this quantitative research was comprised of 2000 parents whose children received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong. The sample collection was based on convenience sampling and parents who were willing to respond to the survey.

### **Data Collection**

The study was conducted from April through May 2023 by employing the factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong questionnaire. Parents were invited to sign the consent forms first, and questionnaires were distributed to parents whose children received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong. Parents responded to the questionnaires with a hard copy or mobile phone, which in order to confirm data collected were correct and precise.

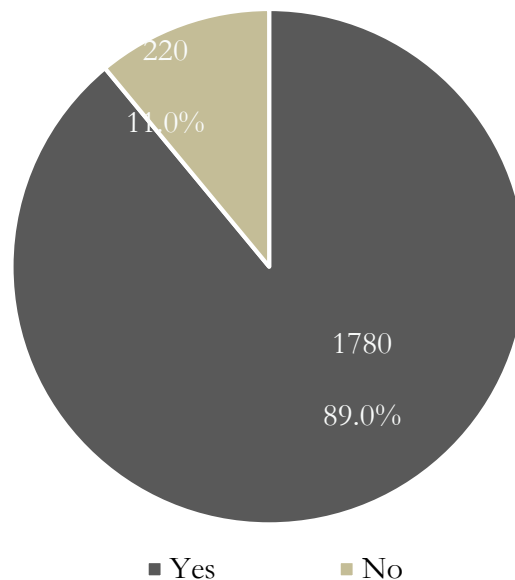
### **Data Analysis**

In order to generate inferential statistics, data were statistically analyzed by Statistical

Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) Version 29.0, descriptive analysis was used to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of sampling, and chi-square test and binary logistic regression were carried out to identify factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong.

## RESULTS

The results present the quantitative results of the main objective of this study which was to investigate factors affecting parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong.



**Figure 2.** *Children Received or Are Enrolling in Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong*

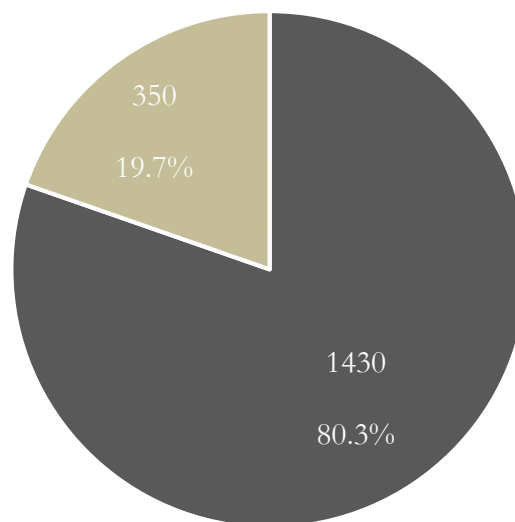
According to Figure 2, 2000 parents were recruited in this investigation, and 220 of them (11.0%) stated their children had not received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, 1780 parents (89.0%) indicated their children received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong, and the socio-demographic characteristics of these 1780 parents were summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Socio-demographic Characteristics of 1780 Parents*

<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>		<b>Frequency (N=1780)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Relation to child	Father	1080	60.7
	Mother	700	39.3
Age (years old)	25 or below	10	0.6
	26-30	220	12.4
	31-35	760	42.7
	36-40	500	28.1
	41 or above	290	16.3
Education (highest education level)	Postgraduate or above	1230	69.1
	Undergraduate	460	25.8
	Tertiary	70	3.9
	Secondary or below	20	1.1
Employment status	Full-time	1550	87.1
	Part-time	110	6.2
	Not working	120	6.7
Occupation	Managers and administrators	310	17.4
	Professionals and associate professionals	810	45.5
	Clerical support workers	120	6.7
	Service and sales workers	360	20.2
	Craft and related trades workers	40	2.2
	Elementary occupations	140	7.9
Family monthly income (HKD)	4000-9999	30	1.7
	10000-49999	1310	73.6
	50000-99999	350	19.7
	100000 and above	90	5.1

Birth order position of the child within the family	Oldest	1320	74.2
	Second	460	25.8
Length of residency in Hong Kong	Less than 5 years	820	46.1
	5-10 years	600	33.7
	10-20 years	40	2.2
	Over 20 years	320	18.0

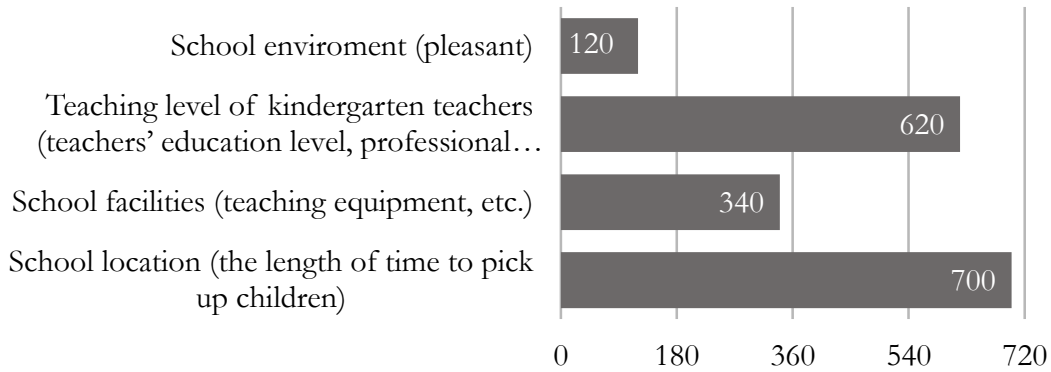
The socio-demographic characteristics of 1780 parents whose children received or are enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong are shown in Table 1, the data collected include gender, age, education, employment status, occupation, family monthly income, birth order position of the child within the family, and length of residency in Hong Kong. Since there are only 10 parents under the age of 25, therefore, the groups “25 or below” and “26-30” are combined and renamed as “30 or below”. Similarly, there are only 20 parents whose highest education level was secondary, therefore, the groups “secondary or below” and “tertiary” are combined and renamed as “tertiary or below”.



■ Non-profit-making kindergarten

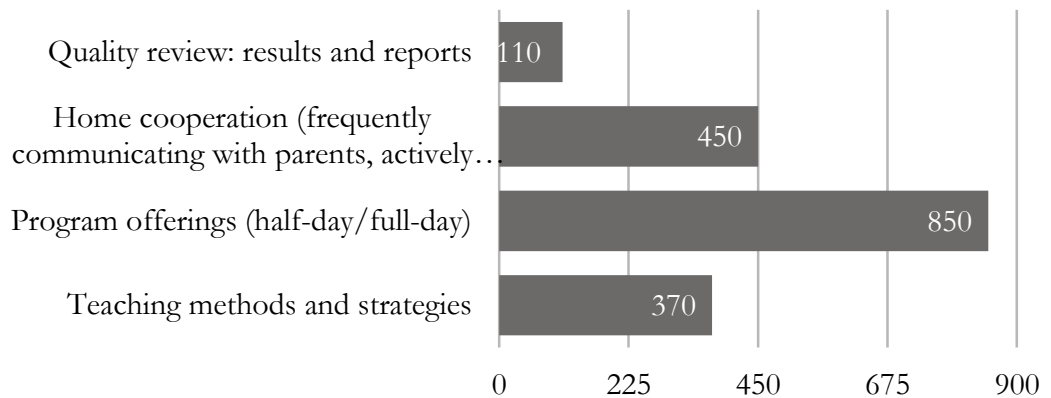
**Figure 3.** *Parents’ Preferences for Non-profit-making Kindergarten and Private Independent Kindergarten*

According to Figure 3, 1430 parents represented 80.3% of participants, preferred non-profit-making kindergarten, whereas 350 parents (19.7%) believed private independent kindergarten was a better choice. From the data above, the majority of parents tended to choose non-profit-making kindergarten for their children in Hong Kong.

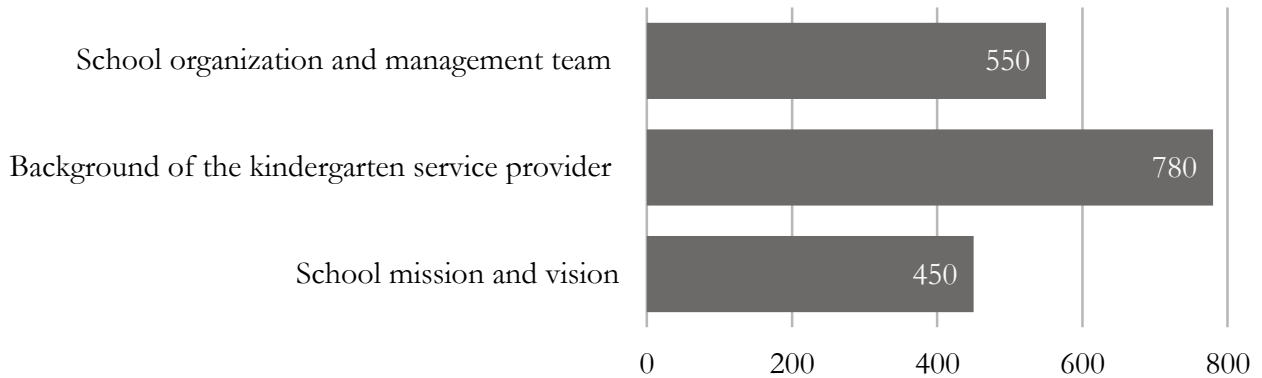


**Figure 4.** *Parents' Preferences Based on School Hardware*

There are four school hardware-related factors affecting parents' choice of early



childhood education in Hong Kong: 700 parents claimed they chose a school mainly based on the school location (the length of time to pick up children); 620 parents stated that teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.) was the most determinant factor in choosing a school; only 340 parents chose school facilities (teaching equipment, etc.) as their determinant factor; the school environment (pleasant) was the least considered factor, where only 120 parents thought the school environment (pleasant) was the principal reason for the choice. Therefore, the author concludes that school location (the length of time to pick up children) and teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.) have the most significant impact on parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong.

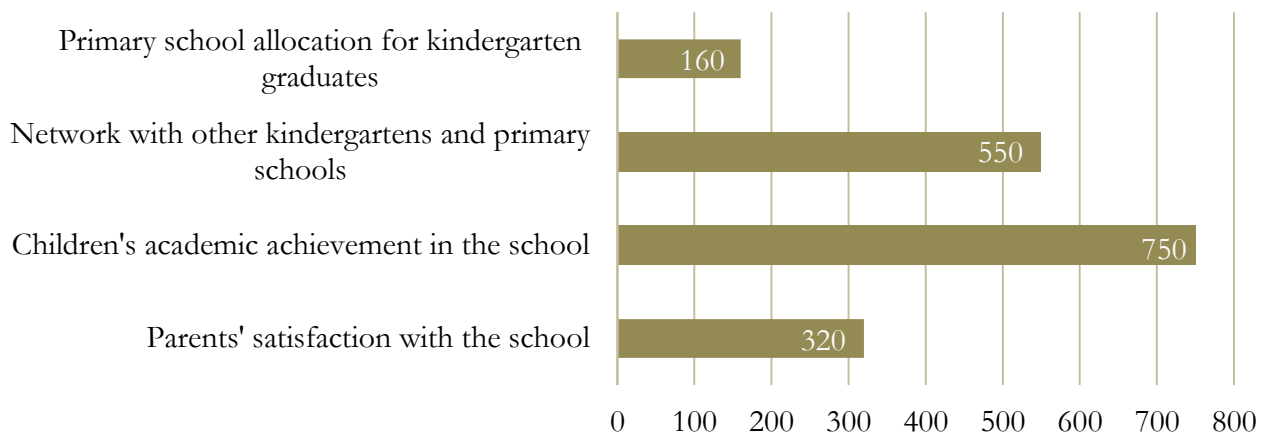


**Figure 5.** *Parents' Preferences Based on School Software*

Based on the data collected from the survey, the school software-related factors were ranked from more significant impacts to smaller impacts on parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong: program offerings (half-day/full-day) (850 parents), home cooperation (frequently communicating with parents, actively following up with children) (450 parents), teaching methods and strategies (370 parents), quality review: results and reports (110 parents). Therefore, the author concludes that program offerings (half-day/full-day) are the most determinant factor in the majority of cases.

**Figure 6.** *Parents' Preferences Based on School Background*

Figure 6 shows parents' preferences based on school background. The school background-related factors chosen by parents were ranked from higher frequency to lower frequency: background of the kindergarten service provider (780 parents), school organization and management team (550 parents), and school mission and vision (450 parents). Therefore, the author concludes that most parents in Hong Kong choose kindergarten based on the background of the kindergarten service provider.



**Figure 7.** *Parents' Preferences Based on School Performance*

Based on the impact on parents' choice of early childhood education in Hong Kong, the

school performance-related factors were ranked from high to low: children's academic achievement in the school (750 parents), network with other kindergartens and primary schools (550 parents), parents' satisfaction with the school (320 parents), and primary school allocation for kindergarten graduates (160 parents). Therefore, children's academic achievement in the school is the most critical factor while choosing schools.

**Table 2.** Relationship between Parents' Socio-demographic Factors and Type of Kindergarten

Parents' socio-demographic factors		Type of kindergarten			$\chi^2$	P
		Total	Non-profit-making kindergarten	Private independent kindergarten		
Relation to child	Father	1080	930 (83.9%)	150 (34.3%)	36.140	<0.001
	Mother	700	500 (16.1%)	200 (65.7%)		
Age (years old)	30 or below	230	170 (48.3%)	60 (37.1%)	7.185	0.066
	31-35	760	680 (31.5%)	80 (42.9%)		
	36-40	500	360 (1.4%)	140 (5.7%)		
	41 or above	290	220 (18.9%)	70 (14.3%)		
Education (highest education level)	Postgraduate or above	1230	1010 (70.6%)	220 (62.9%)	3.723	0.231
	Undergraduate	460	330 (23.1%)	130 (37.1%)		
	Tertiary or below	90	90 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)		
Employment status	Full-time	1550	1290 (90.2%)	260 (74.3 %)	14.280	<0.001
	Part-time	110	100 (7.0%)	10 (2.9%)		
	Not working	120	40 (2.8%)	80 (22.9%)		



Occupation	Managers and administrators	310	180 (12.6%)	130 (37.1%)	19.305	0.001
	Professionals and associate professionals	810	710 (49.7%)	100 (28.6%)		
	Clerical support workers	120	120 (8.4%)	0 (0.0%)		
	Service and sales workers	360	310 (21.7%)	50 (14.3%)		
	Craft and related trades workers	40	30 (2.1%)	10 (2.9%)		
	Elementary occupations	140	80 (5.6%)	60 (17.1%)		
Family monthly income (HKD)	4000-9999	30	30 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)	82.613	<0.001
	10000-49999	1310	1260 (88.1%)	50 (14.3%)		
	50000-99999	350	140 (9.8%)	210 (60.0%)		
	100000 and above	90	0 (0.0%)	90 (25.7%)		
Birth order position of the child within the family	Oldest	1320	1200 (83.9%)	120 (34.3%)	36.140	<0.001
	Second	460	230 (16.1%)	230 (65.7%)		

Length of residency in Hong Kong	Less than 5 years	820	690 (48.3%)	130 (37.1%)	3.998	0.262
	5-10 years	600	450 (31.5%)	150 (42.9%)		
	10-20 years	40	20 (1.4%)	20 (5.7%)		
	Over 20 years	320	270 (18.9%)	50 (14.3%)		

As shown in the chi-square test, none of age, education, or length of residency in Hong Kong has a relationship with the choice of kindergarten type ( $p>0.05$ ). However, the choice of kindergarten type has a relationship with parents' gender, employment status, occupation, family monthly income, and birth order position of the child within the family ( $p<0.001$ ).

According to Table 2, fathers (83.9%) tended to choose non-profit-making kindergartens, but mothers (65.7%) tended to choose private independent kindergartens.

Parents with a full-time job (90.2%) and a part-time job (7.0%) were more likely to choose early childhood education in a non-profit-making kindergarten, while parents without a job (22.9%) were more likely to choose private independent kindergarten.

The possibility of choosing a non-profit-making kindergarten was higher among professionals and associate professionals (49.7%), clerical support workers (8.4%), and service and sales workers (21.7%), whereas the possibility of choosing a private independent kindergarten was higher among managers and administrators (37.1%), craft and related trades workers (2.9%), and elementary occupations (17.1%).

Based on the family monthly income, the families with a monthly income of 4000-9999 HKD (2.1%) and 10000-49999 HKD (88.1%) tended to choose non-profit-making kindergarten; in contrast, the families with a monthly income of 50000-99999 HKD (60.0%) and 100000 HKD and above (25.7%) were more likely to choose private independent kindergarten.

In Hong Kong, the oldest child within the family (83.9%) had a higher chance for early childhood education in a non-profit-making kindergarten, and the second child within the family (65.7%) had a higher chance of receiving early childhood education in a private independent kindergarten.

**Table 3.** *Relationship between Institutional Factors and Type of Kindergarten*

Institutional factors		Type of kindergarten			$\chi^2$	P
		Total	Non-profit-making kindergarten	Private independent kindergarten		
School hardware	School location (the length of time to pick up children)	700	690 (48.3%)	10 (2.9%)	41.440	<0.001
	School facilities (teaching equipment, etc.)	340	300 (21.0%)	40 (11.4%)		
	Teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.)	620	370 (25.9%)	250 (71.4%)		
	School environment (pleasant)	120	70 (4.9%)	50 (14.3%)		
School software	Teaching methods and strategies	370	310 (21.7%)	60 (17.1%)	5.645	0.130
	Program offerings (half-day/full-day)	850	710 (49.7%)	140 (40.0%)		
	Home cooperation (frequently communicating with parents, actively following up with children)	450	350 (24.5%)	100 (28.6%)		
	Quality review: results and reports	110	60 (4.2%)	50 (14.3%)		

School background	School mission and vision	450	410 (28.7%)	40 (11.4%)	11.592	0.003
	Background of the kindergarten service provider	780	660 (46.2%)	120 (34.3%)		
	School organization and management team	550	360 (25.2%)	190 (54.3%)		
School performance	Primary school allocation for kindergarten graduates	160	150 (10.5%)	10 (2.9%)	8.667	0.034
	Network with other kindergartens and primary schools	550	490 (34.3%)	60 (17.1%)		
	Children's academic achievement in the school	750	570 (39.9%)	180 (51.4%)		
	Parents' satisfaction with the school	320	220 (15.4%)	100 (28.6%)		

Based on the chi-square test, there is no relationship between school software and school type chosen ( $p>0.05$ ); the choice of school type has a significant relationship with school hardware, school background, and school performance ( $p<0.001$ ).

Table 3 illustrates that school location (the length of time to pick up children) (48.3%) and school facilities (teaching equipment, etc.) (21.0%) were determinate factors in

choosing non-profit-making kindergarten, and teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.) (71.4%) and school environment (pleasant) (14.3%) were considerable factors while choosing a private independent kindergarten.

The majority of parents chose non-profit-making kindergarten because of school mission and vision (28.7%) and background of the kindergarten service provider (46.2%); and school organization and management team (54.3%) was a factor that parents considered when they chose private independent kindergarten.

The factors related to school performance also play roles in parents' choice of early childhood education institutions in Hong Kong. The primary school allocation for kindergarten graduates (10.5%) and network with other kindergartens and primary schools (34.3%) were the main factors that parents chose non-profit-making kindergarten; meanwhile, children's academic achievement in the school (39.9%) and parents' satisfaction with the school (28.6%) were two factors that play roles in determining private independent kindergarten as an early childhood education institution.

In order to further investigate factors affecting parents' choice of kindergarten type (non-profit-making kindergarten and private independent kindergarten) in Hong Kong, the above factors (gender, employment status, occupation, family monthly income, birth order position of the child within the family, school hardware, school background, and school performance) correlated with the type of kindergarten were incorporated into a binary logistic regression, and the Forward: LD was used for regression analysis.

**Table 4.** *Factors that Influence Parents' Choice of Kindergarten Type (Non-profit-making Kindergarten and Private Independent Kindergarten) in Hong Kong*

Factors	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Constant	-18.859	3.602	27.406	1	0.000	0.000
Family monthly income	3.639	0.763	22.768	1	0.000	38.064
Birth order position of the child within the family	2.220	0.791	7.882	1	0.005	9.207
School hardware			7.486	3	0.058	

School location (the length of time to pick up children)	School facilities (teaching equipment, etc.)	4.031	1.550	6.761	1	0.009	56.326
	Teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.)	3.355	1.308	6.573	1	0.010	28.636
	School environment (pleasant)	3.276	1.503	4.752	1	0.029	26.458
School background				7.404	2	0.025	
School organization and management team	School mission and vision	-2.025	1.088	3.465	1	0.063	0.132
	Background of the kindergarten service provider	-2.195	0.855	6.582	1	0.010	0.111

Through the regression analysis, it was found that four factors were ultimately incorporated into the binary logistic regression: family monthly income, birth order position of the child within the family, school hardware, and school background (Table 4). Since the Sig. of school hardware is 0.058, which is higher than 0.05, it will be considered as marginally significant, thus, further analyses are needed. The Nagelkerke R Square value in the regression model is 0.768, indicating that the regression model can explain 76.8% of the variability.

There is a strong correlation between family monthly income and school type chosen ( $p < 0.001$ ), the higher the family monthly income, the more possibility of choosing a private independent kindergarten. As the family monthly income at this time is the ordinal variable, it is not to be presented.

The birth order position of the child within the family has a strong correlation with the kindergarten type chosen ( $p < 0.01$ ). When the birth order position of the child within the family is the oldest child with the family, the second child within the family is more likely to receive early childhood education in a private independent kindergarten, which is 9.207 times higher than the oldest child with the family.

There is a correlation between school hardware and school type chosen in Hong Kong, shown by a marginal significance ( $p=0.058$ ). When the school location (the length of time to pick up children) is a constant factor, parents who consider more about school facilities (teaching equipment, etc.), teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.), and school environment (pleasant) are more likely to choose a private independent kindergarten, which are 56.326, 28.636, and 26.458 times higher than the school location (the length of time to pick up children).

The marginal correlation ( $p<0.05$ ) can also be illustrated between school background and school type chosen. When the school organization and management team is considered as a constant factor, the probability of choosing a private independent kindergarten is smaller among parents who care more about school mission and vision (28.7%) and background of the kindergarten service provider (46.2%), which are 0.132 and 0.111 times higher than the school organization and management team. Among them, compared with school organization and management team, the probability of choosing a private independent kindergarten is smaller among parents who pay attention to school mission and vision, the difference is only marginally significant ( $p=0.063$ ).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This quantitative research aims to identify factors that parents are concerned about when they choose early childhood education in Hong Kong. This study suggests that both parents' socio-demographic factors and institutional factors have an effect on parents' choices in schools (Opper, 1992). Based on the analysis of data, the findings are:

(1) Parents who are concerned more about school location (the length of time to pick up children) and school facilities (teaching equipment, etc.) tend to choose non-profit-making kindergarten, however, parents prefer private independent kindergarten if they believe teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.) and school environment (pleasant) are the most critical factors (Lee et al., 2015).

(2) When parents choose early childhood education institutions for their children in Hong Kong, they consider the family monthly income, birth order position of the child within the family, school hardware, and school background.

(3) Birth order position of the child within the family alters parents' choice of preschools in Hong Kong. When the birth order position of the child within the family is the oldest child with the family, the second child within the family is more likely to receive early childhood education in a private independent kindergarten, which is 9.207 times higher than the oldest child with the family.

(4) Length of residency in Hong Kong has no effect on parental choice in choosing preschools in Hong Kong.

The study's findings are significant for different early childhood education stakeholder groups in Hong Kong: children and parents, kindergarten service providers, and the government. First, children and parents are beneficiaries of this study. For children, preschools can provide both academic and non-academic preparation before they go to primary school (Leung, 2012): a good preschool can provide a smooth transition to primary school and trigger children's interest in studying (Leung, 2012), if the kindergarten service providers understand their expectations, there would be more preschools that meet their (Chan & Chan, 2003). As a result, both parents and children can access wider opportunities and enjoy a higher quality education. Second, this study also provides a clearer understanding of which groups of people have what types of expectations for early childhood education. In Hong Kong, most early childhood education institutions are privately held (Choi, 2006), so it is essential for kindergarten service providers to understand and meet parents' needs and exceptions (Education Bureau, 2015). Based on the survey results, they can produce specific advertisements targeting a certain group of parents, effectively promoting their business (Lee et al., 2015); for example, affluent families tend to choose private independent kindergartens, therefore, the advertisement post on high-class occasions will be most efficient to attract wealthy families to choose private independent kindergarten, and the content of advertisement can also be more specific and appealing based on the results of this survey (Leung, 2012). In addition, the parents' feedback and satisfaction can be improved if the private kindergarten service providers improve the service of the preschools based on trends overall (Ng et al., 2017). Third, this study is of great reference value for the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The statistics revealed some social issues, including child-care and education equality, which are yet to be improved by stronger governmental support (Siriboe & Harfitt, 2017). Children's education is considered a key catalyst for economic development (Oppen, 1992), if preschools provide a higher quality education and a suitable learning environment for children, the future of Hong Kong would be more diverse, democratic, and civilized (Tam & Chan, 2010).

Notwithstanding the contributions, the limitations of this study should also be addressed. First, since Hong Kong is a metropolitan city where millions of people in the workforces are from mainland China and other countries (Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009), it is worth providing a section in the questionnaire to determine whether the household registered residency (the so-called Hukou applied in mainland China administration) of the sample is in Hong Kong. This will interact with the length of residency in Hong Kong when considering the socio-demographic influence upon parental choices on early childhood education (Wong & Rao, 2015). In addition, the questionnaire in this study was designed with a series of single-choice questions, which is convenient for the sample to fill in yet hard to detect the sample's subtle differences in their tendency and yield more accurate and specific data. Hence, a mode of the Likert scale is advised to be utilized for further information with a larger sample, as the figure of questions can reflect parents' consideration of factors provided to a different extent



(Bell & Stevenson, 2006); in this way, which factor plays the most or least important role could be studied. Furthermore, many of the factors in this study actually correlated with each other: for example, the family monthly income will be decided by the occupation of parents (Leung, 2012), while the occupation of parents might in turn affect the length of parents and children's residency in Hong Kong and the length of time that parents can spend on child-care and after-class communication with their children (Oppen, 1992); additionally, the occupation of parents are relevant to their education, hence influencing their expectations for offspring (Fung & Lam, 2011). Among various factors are complicated and have mutual effects on each other, consequently, it is suggested that future research should utilize the analyses of moderating and mediating effects to study the connection of each factor (Noble, 2007).

This quantitative research can be ameliorated from several aspects below in further practice. The questionnaire of this study needs to be more specific and detailed. Explanations in questionnaires and interviews will be needed in a future study. The environment provided to participants should be more private to reduce distractions. The factors that have already been proved irrelevant to parents' choices will be removed in further research.

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## **APPENDIX A: FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTS' CHOICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN HONG KONG QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Had(Has)/Are(Is) your child(ren) received/enrolling in early childhood education in Hong Kong?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No (Please go to the end page, thanks for your active participation.)
2. What is your relationship with child?
  - A. Father
  - B. Mother
3. What is your age (years old)?
  - A. 25 or below
  - B. 26-30
  - C. 31-35
  - D. 36-40
  - E. 41 or above
4. What is the highest level of full-time education you have completed?
  - A. Postgraduate or above
  - B. Undergraduate
  - C. Tertiary
  - D. Secondary or below
5. What is your employment status?
  - A. Full-time
  - B. Part-time
  - C. Not working
6. What is your occupation?
  - A. Managers and administrators
  - B. Professionals and associate professionals
  - C. Clerical support workers
  - D. Service and sales workers
  - E. Craft and related trades workers
  - F. Plant and machine operators and assemblers
  - G. Elementary occupations
  - H. Other
7. What approximately is your family monthly income?
  - A. Below 4000 HKD
  - B. 4000-9999 HKD
  - C. 10000-49999 HKD
  - D. 50000-99999 HKD
  - E. 100000 HKD and above
8. What is(was) the type of your child's kindergarten?
  - A. Non-profit-making kindergarten

- B. Private independent kindergarten
9. (Based on the eighth question) Which child(ren) does(did) you choose to go to the non-profit-making kindergarten/private independent kindergarten?
- A. Oldest
  - B. Second
  - C. Third
  - D. Fourth or more
10. (Based on the eighth question) How long have you been living in Hong Kong?
- A. Less than 5 years
  - B. 5-10 years
  - C. 10-20 years
  - D. Over 20 years
11. In terms of school hardware, which one do(did) you value most?
- A. School location (the length of time to pick up children)
  - B. School facilities (teaching equipment, etc.)
  - C. Teaching level of kindergarten teachers (teachers' education level, professional ability, etc.)
  - D. School environment (pleasant)
12. In terms of school software, which one do(did) you value most?
- A. Teaching methods and strategies
  - B. Program offerings (half-day/full-day)
  - C. Home cooperation (frequently communicating with parents, actively following up with children)
  - D. Quality review: results and reports
13. Which of the following factors do(did) you pay more attention to when investigating school background?
- A. School mission and vision
  - B. Background of the kindergarten service provider
  - C. School organization and management team
14. Which of the following factors do(did) you attach the highest importance to in terms of school performance?
- A. Primary school allocation for kindergarten graduates
  - B. Network with other kindergartens and primary schools
  - C. Children's academic achievement in the school
  - D. Parents' satisfaction with the school

## APPENDIX B: 影響香港特別行政區家長選擇學前教育的因素調查問卷

1. 請問您的孩子是否（曾）在香港特別行政區接受學前教育？
  - A. 是
  - B. 否（跳轉到結束頁面，感謝您的積極參與。）
2. 請問您是孩子的？
  - A. 父親
  - B. 母親
3. 請問您的年齡是多少（歲）？
  - A. 25或以下
  - B. 26-30
  - C. 31-35
  - D. 36-40
  - E. 41或以上
4. 請問您完成的全日制最高學歷是什麼？
  - A. 碩士研究生或以上
  - B. 本科
  - C. 大專
  - D. 中學或以下
5. 請問您的職業狀態是？
  - A. 全職
  - B. 兼職
  - C. 沒有就業
6. 請問您的職業是什麼？
  - A. 經理和管理員
  - B. 專業人士和準專業人士
  - C. 文書支持人員
  - D. 服務和銷售人員
  - E. 工藝及相關工人
  - F. 工廠和機器操作員及裝配工
  - G. 基本職業
  - H. 其他
7. 請問您的家庭月收入大約是多少？
  - A. 4000港元以下
  - B. 4000~9999港元
  - C. 10000~49999港元
  - D. 50000~99999港元
  - E. 100000港元及以上

8. 請問您孩子的幼稚園是什麼類型的?
  - A. 非牟利幼稚園
  - B. 私立獨立幼稚園
9. (基於第八題) 請問您為您家第幾個孩子選擇非牟利幼稚園/私立獨立幼稚園?
  - A. 長子(長女)
  - B. 次子(次女)
  - C. 三子(三女)
  - D. 幼子(幼女): 通常是第四個或者第五個孩子
10. (基於第八題) 請問您家在香港居住的時長是?
  - A. 5年以下
  - B. 5-10年
  - C. 10-20年
  - D. 20年以上
11. 請問在學校硬件方面, 以下您更看重哪壹個?
  - A. 學校地理位置(接送孩子的時長)
  - B. 學校設施(教學設備等)
  - C. 幼師師資水平(學歷、專業能力等)
  - D. 學校環境(宜人)
12. 請問在學校軟件方面, 以下您更看重哪壹個?
  - A. 教學方法與策略
  - B. 提供就讀的課程(半天/全天)
  - C. 家園合作(經常與家長溝通, 積極跟進孩子情況)
  - D. 質量審查: 結果和報告
13. 請問您在對學校背景進行調研時, 更關注以下哪個因素?
  - A. 學校的使命和願景
  - B. 幼稚園服務提供者的背景
  - C. 學校組織管理團隊
14. 請問在學校表現方面, 以下哪個因素是您最重視的?
  - A. 幼稚園畢業生的小學分配
  - B. 與其他幼稚園和小學的聯絡
  - C. 兒童在學校的學業成就
  - D. 家長對該校的滿意度