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## **Kindergarten Education Policy Implementation: Principal Perceptions, Practices and Challenges in Integrating Music Education to the Curriculum**

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### **Abstract**

Previous studies have suggested that music is a powerful medium for enhancing children's holistic development. The Hong Kong SAR Government's recently-issued *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide* has recognized arts education as a key area in the current curriculum framework, and music is officially recommended as the kindergarten daily activity. Further, the curriculum guide was themed 'Joyful Learning through Play', and it has clearly stated that 'play' should be the focus of the curriculum. Alongside with "learning through play", the curriculum guide has also specified that other approaches and core values, such as "child-centeredness", "real-life themes", and "integrated approach", should be adopted in the major domains of the kindergarten curriculum, including arts education. Despite the growing significance of arts education in the kindergarten curriculum, music has long been marginalized in the education of Hong Kong, and it is often regarded as a non-academic luxury by various stakeholders (e.g, parents, principals and teachers).

Throughout the process of integrating music to the kindergarten curriculum, principals' conception, perception and practices are impactful factors for the ultimate success of implementation. A wealth of literature has explored teacher perception on early childhood music, but research on kindergarten principals' perception remains underexplored. To address this gap in research, this study aims to examine principals' beliefs about, perception of, practices and challenges in integrating music to the early childhood curriculum. The participants consisted of twelve principals who were purposively selected to cover kindergartens of a range of sizes (small, medium and large), programme durations (half-day and full-day) and kindergarten types (non-profit-making kindergartens and private independent kindergartens). In-depth interviews and classroom observations were conducted. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected.

The conclusions drawn from this study suggest that principals' proactive approaches and positive attitudes may modify the passive role of kindergarten teachers in the implementation of official kindergarten curriculum guide in Hong Kong, elevate the status of music education in kindergarten education among other study areas, and foster the adoption of innovative and developmentally appropriate pedagogical approach in music classrooms. The findings of this study will fill an important knowledge gap about the implementation of current education policy in early childhood arts education. Significantly, they will provide the higher institutions with evidence-based recommendations on the development of principal professional training framework through which the challenges of implementing the music curriculum in early childhood education could be addressed, with wider implications to other creative arts across the globe.