

A study on the Effectiveness of the Education Development Fund as a Post-Colonial Strategy to Control Non-Tertiary Education in Macao SAR

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Abstract

As a former colony of Portugal, Macao has experienced slack control on education, which resulted in the diversity in it today. After its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1999, educational legislations and subsidies have been gradually introduced to schools in an attempt to subject the system to a more public and centralized form of control. This study examines the effectiveness of the Education Development Fund, one of the major subsidies offering to schools in Macao SAR, in term of exercising the influences of the educational administrator. In order to identify the expectations of educational administrator, content analysis of the regulations listed in the aforementioned subsidy, from the academic year 2012/2013 to 2015/2016, was conducted. The numbers of applications for such expectations in those 4 academic years are also computed to investigate the correlations of them. The findings show that the educational administrator indicates its expectations through the terminology “Key Funding Items” but the number of applications shows no alignment in the interests of the schools. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Education Development Fund does not influence much on the decisions of the schools and therefore can hardly be constituted as an effective policy mechanism. Other means to enhance the effectiveness of the educational policies should be further discussed and introduced for the unique context of Macao SAR.

Keywords: control education, subsidies, post-colonial, school development

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Introduction

As a former colony of Portugal, the education in Macao has experienced influences, development and transformation through the administration of two governments: Portuguese Administrator of Macao before the return of Chinese sovereignty in 1999 and the Macao Administration under the guidance of the “Basic Law of Macao Special Region” in the “One country, two policies” policy.

During the colonial period, the Portuguese administration applied slack control on education because the priority and public resources were only provided to few public schools while the majority self-sustained private schools operated and developed without much monitor from the government, which results in the diversity in education in Macao today (Shan & Jeong, 2008; Young, 2009). Only after the Joint Declaration were signed was the prospect of Macao questioned and the first educational legislation, Law No. 11/91/M was promulgated in 1991 and was in force before the promulgation of the Fundamental Law of Non-tertiary – Law No. 9/ 2006 and other decrees. Those legislations defined many areas in non-tertiary education and the system was gradually subject to a better control (DSEJ, 2006; MSAR, 1991) . However, schools in Macao today still enjoy much autonomy in term of deciding their own development, which is the results of the diversity and is regarded as an important feature in education here. Therefore, in addition to legislation, subsidies are also provided to schools under different categories (DSEJ, 2016d).

The Education Development Fund was established in 2007 and has been provided to schools to augment the development of educational plans and activities in a more effective way and to stabilize the investment of educational resources. Schools can apply for it through the application of School Development Plan for each academic year (DSEJ, 2016a). Despite the large investment in the Education Development Fund, the implementation of it is rarely researched. This present study investigated its effectiveness in influencing the decisions of the schools in Macao SAR. It is to examine part of the implementation of public resources and seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the educational administrator of Macao SAR illustrate its concerns and expectations through the Education Development Fund?
2. How did the Education Development Fund influence school decisions?

Literature Review

The History of Education in Macao

Historically, the Portuguese firstly came to Macao for shelter and later utilized it as a trading centre to China and other Far East countries. Only after the 1557 did the Portuguese and the Ming Dynasty of China officially agree with the Portuguese “lending or letting Macao” (Shan & Jeong, 2008). At that moment, the primary interests of the Portuguese administration of Macao focused on three main groups of communities: Portuguese residing in Macao, Portuguese born in Macao and the Eurasian “Macanese” (Shan & Jeong, 2008). Those three groups of people were given top priority and the educational policy and institutions, mainly non-tertiary education by the Portuguese administration, were set up to serve those three groups of people,

and the other schools serving the Chinese and founded by unofficial organizations were ignored and received little support from the government.

Those schools included church schools (Catholic or Christian), Yixue (charity schools), other primary and secondary schools and vocational schools. They were set up and operated autonomously and were seldom intervened by the government officials. As those schools had long been depending on themselves both administratively and financially without supervision from the government, they developed their own curriculum and instruction, which finally resulted in the diversity in education (Shan & Jeong, 2008; Young, 2007). For a long time, the coexistence of public and private school systems could be found in Macao. It was not until the Sino-Portugal Joint Declaration was signed in 1984 when the prospect of Macao gained attention and the education system was first required control.

Educational legislations in Macao

In order to answer the need for a more standardized education system in non-tertiary education, the Law No. 11/91/M was promulgated in 1991. It provided instruction and guidance to educational institutions in Macao (MSAR, 1991). Nevertheless, the difference in curriculum, standard of education, the qualification of teaching staff as well as the conditions of school environment remained huge.

After the hand-over to China in 1999, the administration of Macao SAR has been trying to further minimalize the differences among schools through the legislation of Law No. 9/2006 – Fundamental Law of Non-tertiary. Under the Law No. 9/2006, many areas of education were defined: general regulations, the principles and objectives of the education system, composition of non-tertiary education, compulsory education and free education, curriculum, educational support, education institutions and school system, human resources, material resources, education funds, implementation and evaluation of the education system as well as final and transitional stipulations (DSEJ, 2006).

Under the legislation of this law, the non-tertiary education in Macao is classified into two types: formal education and continuing education. Formal education includes kindergartens, primary schooling, secondary school, and special education while family education, recurrent education, community education, vocation training and other educated activities are included in continuing education. However, the vocational technical education can be implemented in both types and can be offered in senior secondary level only (DSEJ, 2016c).

The Macao school systems are consisted of two main types of school: public and private. The later can be further divided into schools following the local education system and schools which do not follow the local education system. Those which follow the local education system are defined as non-profit-making private schools, in which two more categories can be found: schools under the free education and schools under the paid educations (DSEJ, 2016c). Chart 1 below illustrates the non-tertiary education system in Macao.

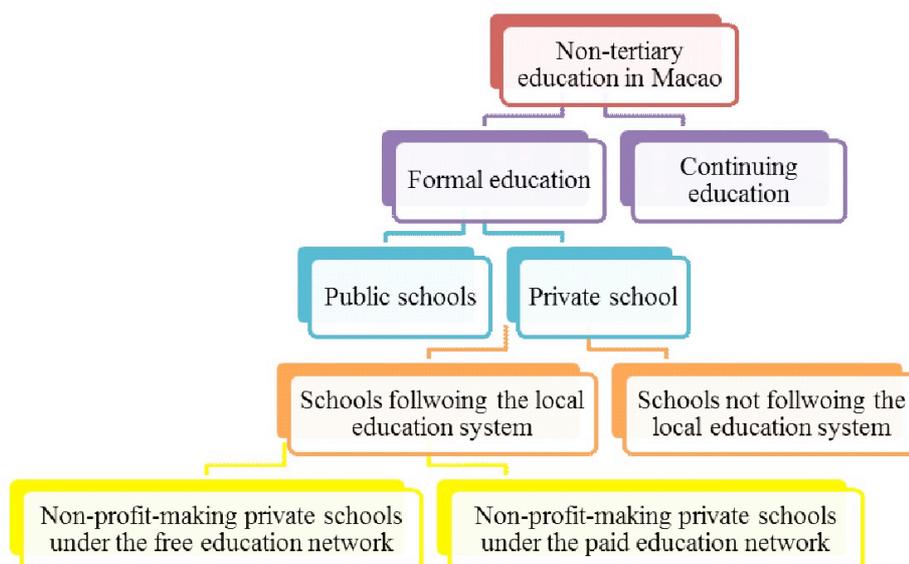


Figure 1 The non-tertiary education system in Macao

Education Subsidies

Two subsidies are provided to schools following the local education system. The primary one is free education subsidy which can only be offered to public schools and non-profit-making private schools under the free education network. The students in those schools do not pay tuition, complementary expenses and other related fees of studying and certificate. Another one is the student-teacher ratio subsidy which is offered to all schools following the local education system. Schools will be subsidized in accordance with the ratio of students and teachers generated by certain equation (DSEJ, 2016d). In term of encouraging development among schools, the Education Development Fund was established in accordance with Article No. 48 of Law No. 9/2006 through Administrative Regulation No. 16/2007 in 2007 (DSEJ, 2016a).

The Education Development Fund is open for application for all non-profit-making private schools in the scope of non-tertiary education through the subsidy scheme of School Development Plan (DSEJ, 2016e). The objectives of it are to optimize the development of educational plans and activities and to stabilize the investment of educational resources. There are 7 core areas (DSEJ, 2016a):

1. To enhance students' ability in humanistic literacy, scientific research area, critical thinking as well as international perspectives;
2. To improve the conditions and environment of schools by upgrading the IT facilities for various teaching methods and creating a safe and healthy place;
3. To ameliorate school-based curriculum and implement teaching pilot schemes to promote successful learning;
4. To promote continuing learning among teaching staff through school-based training and individual study plan;
5. To assure the balance development of students through strengthening their concepts of nations and organizing various learning and leisure activities;

6. To support personalized education for students with special needs by creating appropriate learning environment;
7. To nurture the development of continuing education through promoting various training like sports and art.

The former subsidies, namely the free education subsidy and the student-teacher ratio subsidy, are provided based on the numbers of students and certain equation. Both subsidies are provided in order to secure the legislation of laws and other decrees promulgated by the administration of Macao SAR in terms of school operations, which are more regular and easier to control. However, when referring to the development and the fulfillment of special needs in the education in Macao, it is more difficult to control and examine. The implementation of it is also unresearched. Therefore, the study investigated the of Education Development Fund and examined its effectiveness in influencing schools in Macao.

Methodology

The methodology consisted of two stages. In the first stage, content analysis was applied to compare the regulations of the School Development Plan from the academic years of 2012/2013 to 2015/2016 in order to investigate the educational concerns and expectations of the educational administrator in Macao. The selection of regulations in those 4 academic years was based on the following two criteria: availability and researchability.

The official website of the Education Development Fund is the only source to obtain the regulations and the funding results, the record of which only starts from the academic year of 2011/2012. Moreover, since its establishment in 2007, the regulations of the Fund were relatively simple and indicators to illustrate the concerns of the educational administrator were hardly found. However, certain terminologies can be found reiterating in the regulations since the academic year of 2012/2013.

In the second stage, the numbers of school applications for such expectations in those 4 academic years were also computed to examine the correlations of them. The numbers of school applying the Fund are illustrated in the figure below.

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
# of schools in Macao	78	77	77	77
# of schools applying the Fund	65	66	66	65
% of schools applying the Fund	83.3%	85.7%	85.7%	84.4%

Table 1 The number of schools applying the Education Development Fund

Findings

The terminology “key funding” was first found in the regulation of 2012/2013 and was changed into “key funding items” in 2013/2014 (DSEJ, 2016e). Later, it was replaced by “Major Funding items” in 2014/2015 and was still in use in the regulation of 2015/2016 (DSEJ, 2016e). Under this category, three main areas were included:

Enhancing students' language proficiency, Developing students' moral and civic competence and Facilitating students' enjoyable and effective learning. The other category is called Other Subsidies in which two areas are put: Professional development of the teaching staff and School building renovation and equipment renewal.

Each area under the two main categories contains several items and the total numbers of funding items had been increasing in those 4 years. It is also discovered that while the items under the category of Other Subsidies remained the same, the items in Key Funding (or Major Funding Items) were increased or altered in those 4 respective year, which indicated that they were given more consideration and were changed based on the special needs in the development of education in that respective academic year.

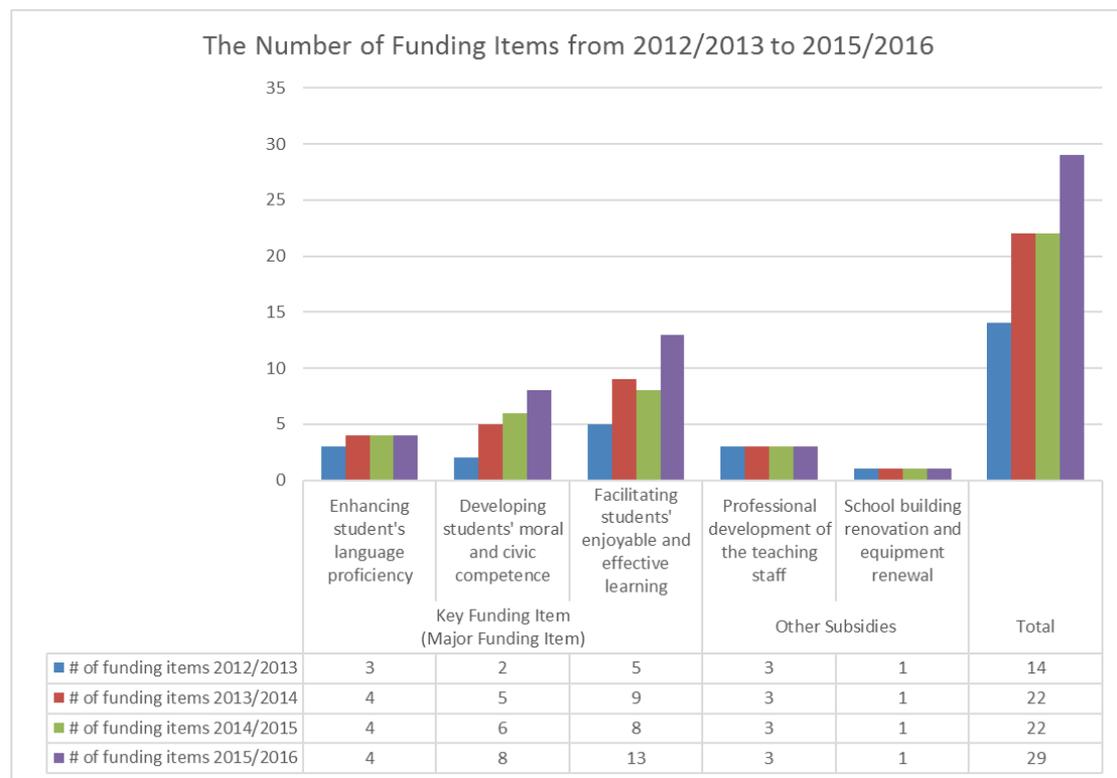


Figure 2 Summary of the number of Funding items from 2012/2013 to 2015/2016

Comparison of those Key Funding Items (or Major Funding Items) also found twelve items appeared in the regulations of School Development Plan for four straight years and another two were listed for three straight years since their appearance in the academic year of 2013/2014.

Key Funding Items (Major Funding Items)		Academic Year			
		2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Enhancing students' language proficiency	School-based language learning and reading activities	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Establishment of school-based Portuguese Curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Optimization of the reading conditions in School (Enhancing the school reading environment)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Language certification subsidies for students and teaching staff		✓	✓	✓
Developing students' moral and civic competence	Promotion of school-based moral education development	✓	✓	✓	✓
	"Be acquainted with our Mother Country, Love for China" Learning Excursion	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Promoting healthy development of Student Association	✓	✓	✓	✓
Facilitating students' enjoyable and effective learning	Vocational-technical Education	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Curriculum Development Pilot Project	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Setting up multiple fitness centres	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Opening campus facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓
	"Putting the Learning into Practice - School-based Application Curriculum" Pilot Project	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Information Technology Education	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Inclusive Education/ Special Education		✓	✓	✓

Table 2 Summary of the Key Funding Items (Major Funding Items) from the academic year 2012/2013 to 2015/2016

By looking at the table above, 4 items included in those four school years under the area of Enhancing Students' language proficiency were repeated 3 straight or above while 3 and 7 items were repeated in the areas of Developing students' moral and civic competence and Facilitating students' enjoyable and effective learning respectively.

The number of schools applying for the School Development Plan is 65 and 66, 66 as well as 65 which accounted for 83.3%, 85.7%, 85.7% and 84.4% of the total number of schools in Macao in the academic years of 2013/2014, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 respectively as illustrated in Table 1 previously.

When further studying the results of the application of the School Development Plan from the school year 2012/2013 to 2015/2016, the numbers of schools applying the repeated Key Funding Items (or Major Funding Items) listed in Table 2 are as below.

Key Funding Items (Major Funding Items)		Academic Year		2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015		2015/2016	
		# of schools	% of school	# of schools	% of school	# of schools	% of school	# of schools	% of school		
Enhancing students' language proficiency	School-based language learning and reading activities	47	72.3%	44	67.7%	46	69.7%	41	63.1%		
	Establishment of school-based Portuguese Curriculum	5	7.7%	6	9.2%	5	7.6%	5	7.7%		
	Optimization of the reading conditions in School (Enhancing the school reading environment)	15	23.1%	11	16.9%	10	15.2%	4	6.2%		
	Language certification subsidies for students and teaching staff	--	--	23	35.4%	27	40.9%	31	47.7%		
Developing students' moral and civic competence	Promotion of school-based moral education development	49	75.4%	52	80.0%	53	80.3%	51	78.5%		
	"Be acquainted with our Mother Country, Love for China" Learning Excursion	55	84.6%	51	78.5%	50	75.8%	54	83.1%		
	Promoting healthy development of Student Association	29	44.6%	35	53.8%	36	54.5%	39	60.0%		
Facilitating students' enjoyable and effective learning	Vocational-technical Education	8	12.3%	8	12.3%	8	12.1%	16	24.6%		
	Curriculum Development Pilot Project	16	24.6%	24	36.9%	22	33.3%	23	35.4%		
	Setting up multiple fitness centres	17	26.2%	10	15.4%	6	9.1%	7	10.8%		
	Opening campus facilities	6	9.2%	11	16.9%	9	13.6%	8	12.3%		
	"Putting the Learning into Practice - School-based Application Curriculum" Pilot Project	58	89.2%	55	84.6%	52	78.8%	52	80.0%		
	Information Technology Education	23	35.4%	32	49.2%	30	45.5%	30	46.2%		
	Inclusive Education/ Special Education	--	--	14	21.5%	14	21.2%	12	18.5%		

Table 3 Summary of the number of schools applying for the repeated Key Funding Items (Major Funding Items)

The most frequently applied item is “Putting the Learning into Practice – School-based Application Curriculum” Pilot Project with the mean of 83.2% of applications out of the total numbers of schools applying for the Education Development Fund in those four academic years. “Be acquainted with our Mother Country, Love for China” Learning Excursion is the second frequently applied item with an average of 80.5% followed by Promotion of school-based moral education development with 78% in average. The least frequently applied item is Establishment of school-based Portuguese Curriculum with the average of 8%, which is the only item applied by the schools least than 10% in average. Opening campus facilities and Optimization of the reading conditions in School (Enhancing the school reading environment) are also low in the application, with 13% and 15.35% of the total applications in average. It is also noted that only 5 out of 14 items were applied over 50% of the total applications while the application of 6 items was below 20% or slightly higher than 20%.

Key Funding Items (Major Funding Items)		Academic Year				Mean
		2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	
		% of school	% of school	% of school	% of school	
Enhancing students' language proficiency	School-based language learning and reading activities	72.3%	67.7%	69.7%	63.1%	68.2%
	Establishment of school-based Portuguese Curriculum	7.7%	9.2%	7.6%	7.7%	8.0%
	Optimization of the reading conditions in School (Enhancing the school reading environment)	23.1%	16.9%	15.2%	6.2%	15.33%
	Language certification subsidies for students and teaching staff	--	35.4%	40.9%	47.7%	41.3%
Developing students' moral and civic competence	Promotion of school-based moral education development	75.4%	80.0%	80.3%	78.5%	78.5%
	"Be acquainted with our Mother Country, Love for China" Learning Excursion	84.6%	78.5%	75.8%	83.1%	80.5%
	Promoting healthy development of Student Association	44.6%	53.8%	54.5%	60.0%	53.3%
Facilitating students' enjoyable and effective learning	Vocational-technical Education	12.3%	12.3%	12.1%	24.6%	15.34%
	Curriculum Development Pilot Project	24.6%	36.9%	33.3%	35.4%	32.6%
	Setting up multiple fitness centres	26.2%	15.4%	9.1%	10.8%	15.35%
	Opening campus facilities	9.2%	16.9%	13.6%	12.3%	13.0%
	"Putting the Learning into Practice - School-based Application Curriculum" Pilot Project	89.2%	84.6%	78.8%	80.0%	83.2%
	Information Technology Education	35.4%	49.2%	45.5%	46.2%	44.1%
	Inclusive Education/ Special Education	--	21.5%	21.2%	18.5%	20.4%

Table 4 Summary of the applications for the repeated Key Funding Items (Major Funding Items) from the academic year of 2012/2013 to 2015/2016

Discussion and Suggestion

The Education Development Fund is an essential subsidy for the schools in Macao SAR as a very high percentage of schools applied for it in the academic years from 2012/2013 to 2015/2016. However, the function of such subsidy confined in informing the concerns and expectations of the educational administrator and was unable to influence the schools to answer such concerns and expectations.

In spite of the stress of the educational administrator on those fourteen Key Funding Items (or Major Funding Items) by restating them three to four successive years, the numbers of schools applying for them fluctuated and did not reflect much correlation with the expectations of the educational administrator in Macao. More interestingly, an item, namely “Promoting students’ successful Learning”, was found in the application of the schools even though it was not an item listed in the regulations (DSEJ, 2016b). The numbers of the application for such item was as high as 38, 42, 40 and 41 in the numbers of school and 58.5%, 63.6%, 60.6% and 63.1% in those four academic years respectively. The reason for such high percentage of application could be the wide-spread concerns of the high retention rate revealed in a report by OECD in 2009 (OECD, 2010; Wong, 2013) and the future legislation on the retention rate in non-tertiary education.

Nevertheless, such correlation may still be low as the ongoing legislation of Special Education System did not accelerate the applications on the subsidy for Inclusion Education. A research revealed that perspectives of other stakeholders: teachers, parents, students and communities, also affected the decision of a school to adapt inclusive education (Wu, Hui, & Cheung, 2015). It can be concluded that schools made decisions on development based on their own needs and concerns of the stakeholders, rather than on the amount of subsidy they can obtain. Therefore, the Education Development Fund is not an effective policy mechanism in term of influencing the decisions of the schools in Macao. Other studies on the factors that influence the decisions of the schools as well as the implementation of the subsidies are desired to reflect the utilization of the public resource in a more holistic way.

Conclusion

The education in Macao are still experiencing the influences of the slack control by its former colonial Portuguese administrator and enjoying the diversity today while legislations and subsidies has been gradually introduced by its post-colonial Macao SAR educational administrator in an attempt to subject the system to a more centralized form of control. However, the effectiveness of those subsidies are hardly researched. This study investigated the Education Development Fund, one of the major subsidies here, to examine its effectiveness. Content analysis of the regulations of such subsidy from the academic year of 2012/2013 to 2015/2016 discovered that the items under the terminology “Key Funding Items” or “Major Funding Items” were revised, altered and increased from years to years while items under the category of “Other Subsidies” remained unchanged in four years straight, which illustrates consideration and expectation was emphasized on those items. However, the numbers of application for such items did not show much correlation with the decision of the schools and cannot be regarded as an effective educational mechanism. In order to better utilize the public resource, studies on the factors influencing the school decision and the implementation of the subsidies are desired to help enhance the effectiveness of educational policies for the unique context of Macao SAR.

Simultaneously, guidelines and instructions on the supervision and a measurement of the effectiveness of the implementation of the subsidies should be created in order to ensure the appropriate use of public money.

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