



Title: Understanding the Effects of the Child Support Model: Experiences of Children and Families from Low-Income Backgrounds

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Summary

Xie et al.'s (2022) study, titled "Understanding the Effects of the Child Support Model: Experiences of Children and Families from Low-Income Backgrounds", investigates the effects of the Child Support Model (CSM) launched by NTUC First Campus (NFC) in selected preschool centres in Singapore. The CSM, launched in 2016, aims to enhance accessibility to high-quality and affordable early childhood care and education, specifically targeting children from disadvantaged or lower-income backgrounds. Through this model, families and children receive a comprehensive array of support, including financial assistance schemes, dedicated *Child Enabling Executives* (CEEs) offering social support, and customised learning programs designed to address the specific needs of the students.

The study addressed four main research questions encompassing various aspects of the CSM. The first two questions examined the impact of the CSM on the well-being and learning outcomes of children from low-income families, respectively. The third question focused on the experiences of parents involved with the CSM, while the final question explored the overall effect of the CSM on vulnerable families in Singapore. To gather comprehensive data, a mixed methods approach was employed, combining qualitative techniques such as in-depth case studies, with quantitative measures assessing child development and learning environment quality. The study involved a total of 58 child participants enrolled in the CSM across 10 different centres. Data collection occurred from January 2019 to October 2021.

Regarding the first research question, the study found that children benefited from the well-being support provided by the CSM program. Well-being levels remained consistent

over time, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the children's Laever's well-being scores ranged between 3.5 and 4, indicating a classroom environment that lies between neutral and supportive.

Strong support was found for the effect of the CSM on children's learning outcomes. Through the use of IED-III Standardised scores (based on the Brigance Inventory of Early Development III) the research demonstrated that children enrolled in the CSM exhibited significant advancements in language and academic development when compared to their same-age peers in Singapore. This finding is particularly noteworthy, considering that these children were identified in existing literature as being at risk of developmental gaps. Furthermore, by employing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), researchers observed a statistically significant reduction in behavioural difficulties among the children over the study duration. Alongside improved learning outcomes, children participating in CSM-related activities displayed increased engagement in the learning process compared to the standard curriculum.

Regarding the third and fourth research questions, the study revealed that the CSM effectively addressed the diverse needs of lower-income families by offering relevant resources and assistance. Parents who participated in the study expressed high levels of appreciation for the CEEs who provided valuable support in financial and communication matters. For example, they played a pivotal role in facilitating connections between families and external sources of financial aid, offering parenting guidance, and granting access to various activities that the families may have otherwise been unable to afford. Qualitative analysis of parents' experiences emphasised the significant role of the CSM in facilitating a smooth transition for children as they moved on to primary school. However, the study identified a need for enhanced provision of socio-emotional support to families, highlighting an area for potential improvement within the CSM framework.

Beyond the aforementioned findings, the researchers noted that a distinctive feature of the CSM was the collaboration between in-house CSM professionals and centre staff. This collaboration was instrumental in providing multidimensional support as each professional



brought unique expertise and resources to support the children and their families. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain high quality work by ensuring that these employees are not overwhelmed with additional tasks or workload. Another significant finding was how the CSM provided responsive support to children and their families during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. CSM professionals helped in various ways, such as addressing concerns about the children's slowed learning during the crisis, the increased risk of domestic issues, and families' access to learning support. Alongside Centre Principals, these professionals provided well-being support to vulnerable families through regular video calls.

In summary, the study has demonstrated the CSM's efficacy in providing high-quality support for children from low-income families. Drawing from diverse data sources collected over a three-year span, the CSM has shown its ability to deliver personalised and culturally relevant education. Moreover, it has successfully fostered improved communication and collaboration among stakeholders, enabling effective support for children and empowering their families, even in challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on these findings, the authors strongly advocate for the ongoing implementation and enhancement of the CSM.

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