

# **FED-CEPECE Seminar: “Balancing Market Forces and State Intervention: Early Childhood Education Policy in Hong Kong”**

**Centre for Educational Psychology and Early Childhood Education (CEPECE),  
Faculty of Education**

**Date & Time:** 16 December 2025 (Tuesday); 10:30-12:00

**Venue:** Tin Ka Ping Lecture Hall, Faculty of Education (E33-G021)

**Language:** English

**Registration:** Online Registration (<https://go.um.edu.mo/bewrq480> or )

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## **Speakers:**

Prof. Nirmala RAO is the Serena H C Yang Professor in Early Childhood Development and Education, Chair Professor of Child Development and Education, and Director of the Consortium for Research on Early Childhood Development and Education (CORE) in the Faculty of Education at The University of Hong Kong (HKU). Her work sits at the intersection of early childhood education and developmental psychology, focusing on child development and preschool quality across Asia. Her interdisciplinary research also demonstrates that girls' education is a foundational driver of intergenerational well-being, with measurable effects on child development. Her work appears in leading journals, and she has earned international awards. Since 2022, she has been listed among Stanford University's top 2% of scientists worldwide in the social sciences. She serves on the editorial boards of premier journals. Committed to knowledge exchange, she has served on numerous non-profit and professional boards. She has also regularly provided expertise and consultancy to UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, and the WHO. Additionally, she has extensive senior management experience at HKU.

## **Abstract:**

Hong Kong has maintained universal preschool access for children aged 3–6 through a unique public-private partnership model since the 1980s, creating an ecosystem where market mechanisms intersect with government oversight and regulation. Over five decades, systemic reforms have transformed funding, teacher training, quality assurance, and curriculum, resulting in a high-performing early childhood education system. Current challenges include (i) declining birth rates, which have led to a 23% decline in enrolment over the past decade; (ii) competition among providers; (iii) social stratification, with government-subsidised local kindergartens operating parallel to premium international schools serving affluent families; and (iv) preserving the coexistence of progressive educational paradigms and traditional Chinese cultural values. Sustaining this hybrid model requires recalibrating three priorities: balancing market efficiency with equitable access, strengthening parental engagement, and ensuring effective regulatory oversight. Hong Kong's experience offers critical insights for jurisdictions navigating the scaling of quality early education amidst shrinking populations and geopolitical transitions.