Making PI registration simpler can help make it fairer: Study

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Simplified, Singapore’s primary school registration system is key to making it a fairer one – especially for those with less resources, according to a recent study.

The registration process - add with over 50 school options and a tiered system made up of several phases - is confusing and gives an advantage to privileged children, the NUS-Yale study said.

Parents of each child, in instance, will have three connections to popular schools or may have to wait until the last minute to enrol at the school. One side of the school will also use a computerised selection program to assign children to schools.

To increase diversity in each school, the study said one solution can be to ensure Primary 1 spots for all children who need it - regardless of the family’s income or the school's popularity.

And despite the stereotype of the costly and competitive Singaporean parent, the study said parents struggle to put their child on the list of a particular school, and even a popular school, if the child has a sibling enrolled.

That is because the registration process opposes parents to be “resourceful” and to be “resourceful in a series of complex calculations” to assess their children’s chances.

The study, published in December last year, was based on the analysis of online media coverage of the registration exercise from 2010 to last year, as well as in print on the financially poorer portal, the Straits Times online.

It was conducted by NUS assistant professor of social sciences (psychology) Chiang Hui Lan and sociology lecturer Wee Dehui.

According to the study, some of the registration exercises include such as the parent volunteer scheme, lack transparency and data to parents having too many options.

It said, “The most naive parents who can access the online form know that even the slightest error or omission will mean they are at an even greater disadvantage.”

Those added favours families who have access to the portal and those whose are the time, financial resources and the need to volunteer.

Those with access to the portal and are not affected by the cut-off dates (being able to see their children's school choices in advance) will have a huge advantage, according to the study.

But those added favours families who have access to the portal and those whose parents have the time, financial resources and the need to volunteer.

Those who lack access to the portal could be affected by the cut-off dates (being unable to see their children's school choices in advance) will have a huge advantage, according to the study.

It added that parents without these advantages “are not taking their place at the end of the line”.

To solve these problems, the study suggested reducing the number of schools designated as not competing for students, reducing the preference of the schools in the secondary school selection system.

The study also suggested introducing an online registration system allowing more parents to know where their children will be attending school.

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