

The Professional Development Needs of Hong Kong Kindergarten English Teachers: A Case Study of English Oral Language Input in Kindergarten Classrooms

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Outline

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Background — Free quality kindergarten education

- Implemented starting from the 2017/18 school year
- Aims to provide good quality and highly affordable kindergarten education

Professional qualification requirements for Hong Kong kindergarten teachers

“As models of language learning for children, teachers should possess good proficiency in spoken English, speak with accurate pronunciation and use language correctly.”

(Education Bureau, 2017a: 42–43)

Problem — Lack of professional training

- Less than 30% of Hong Kong kindergartens have teachers who received formal training in teaching English as a second language (TESL).
- 13.7% of the kindergartens even have untrained English teachers.
- Kindergarten English teachers currently do not need to take the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT) and are not required to undergo formal TESL training.

Focus of the study — English oral language input

- Vocal utterances a learner has heard and comprehended
- Crucial for children to develop the phonological awareness of English
- Classroom as one main source of oral language input for children

Oral Input Quality Observation Scheme

- Capture the oral input in kindergarten classrooms, both quantitatively and qualitatively
- Enable comparison across different contexts as well as in-depth analysis
- Based on the Input Quality Observation Scheme proposed by Weitz et al. (2010)

Oral Input Quality Observation Scheme

Teachers' input

- Quantity
 - L2 amount; Direct L1 use
- Input characteristics
 - Pronunciation; Varied input; Ritualised phrases; Verbal reinforcement; Focus on form
- Promoting pronunciation
 - Fun repetitions; Individual practice; Explanation and comparison; Diagrams
- Reacting to children's output
 - Encourage and maintain L2 output; Corrective feedback

Oral Input Quality Observation Scheme

Children's output

- Quantity
 - L2 amount; L1 amount
- Output characteristics
 - Pronunciation; Associated words; Interaction with others with the new words

Class observations – Method

- Aim: Examine the teachers' English oral input and children's oral output in the classroom
- Class observations conducted in the English lessons in one Hong Kong kindergarten
 - A **K2** class with 8 children & a **K3** class with 19 children
 - Local Chinese children with Cantonese as their L1
 - Taught by two non-native-speaking local Chinese teachers in English

Class observations – Preliminary results

(Teacher's input)

	K2 class	K3 class
Quantity		
• L2 amount	Only English was used.	English was used in teaching.
• Direct L1 use	No	Cantonese was used for matters of class discipline.
Input characteristics		
• Pronunciation	Near native	Non-native
• Ritualised phrases	Yes	Yes
• Verbal reinforcement	Yes	Yes
Promoting pronunciation	Yes	Yes
Corrective feedback	Yes	No

Class observations – Preliminary results (*Children's output*)

	K2 class	K3 class
Use of L1	Yes	Yes
Corrective feedback	Average	Little

Summary of findings

- Rich oral input from the teachers
- Common features of Hong Kong English in the teachers' utterances, e.g.
 - mixed the voiced and voiceless sounds such as /s/ and /z/
 - misused simple and past tenses
- The children's output showed similar pronunciation features, suggesting that they were influenced by the input from the teachers.

Summary of findings

- Teachers used ritualised phrases and verbal reinforcement, as well as promoted children's L2 use.
- There were times when the teachers' pedagogical skills appeared to be insufficient to facilitate the children's learning of English pronunciation, e.g.
 - When introducing the /k/ sound and words with this sound by showing vibrations in the throat, the children were not shown how to understand this, and only mimicked the teacher's pronunciation of the words
 - No corrective feedback on children's mispronunciation, other than positive feedback (e.g. 'good job' and 'well done').

Discussion

- Teachers' oral input influences the oral output of the children.
- Formal training in TESL is likely to be helpful for the kindergarten teachers.
- A larger scale of class observations is needed to examine the oral input from teachers with different levels and areas of professional qualification.

Future work

- More observations with different observers for statistical analysis on the objectivity and reliability of the Oral Input Quality Observation Scheme.
- Collection of supplementary data (e.g. video-recording of class observations) in addition to the observation scheme to enable more in-depth analysis.

Thank you.