

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO INFORM TEACHERS ON HOW BEST TO UTILIZE THEIR TIME IN ENGLISH LESSONS

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Abstract

English is an important foreign language for children in Asia. In certain economies specializing in international trade (e.g., Hong Kong), parents have high expectations on their preschoolers' English proficiency. Since instruction time for English in preschools is often limited in these societies (20 to 25 minutes per day, 3 to 5 times a day), school principals sometimes have difficulty deciding how the best teachers of English should utilize the time in their English lessons in order to maximize children's language development. In this study, I compared three types of preschool English lessons: story-telling, arts and craft, and phonics lessons in order to understand the teacher's use of the language. In particular, I am interested in the number of times teachers repeat vocabularies and the complexity of the sentences used (as indexed by the type-token ratio and mean length of utterance respectively). The idea is that the type of lessons which affords the richest use of language (i.e., where words are repeated and used in lengthier sentences) is likely to stimulate children's oral language development, which serves as the foundation for children's future literacy development. An analysis of six 25-minute English lessons revealed that teachers were less likely to repeat words and more likely to use shorter sentences in phonics lessons in comparison to other lesson types. The implication is that for preschools in which English exposure time is limited, a predominance of phonics lessons (e.g., two out of three lessons in a week) might be detrimental to young children's oral language development.

Keywords: English Lessons and Language Development.