



The Language Domain in Taiwan's *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*: An Analysis of Goals and Content

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan's *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* (2017) identifies six essential learning domains: language, physical movement and health, cognition, social development, emotional growth, and aesthetic appreciation. Beyond the framework's policy directives, scholars in early childhood education have consistently examined the processes, challenges, and pedagogical strategies associated with children's language development. Collectively, these efforts highlight the centrality of language learning as both a policy priority and a persistent focus of scholarly inquiry within Taiwan's early childhood education context. Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the language domain outlined in the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*, with particular emphasis on its educational goals and curricular content.

KEYWORDS: Early childhood education, *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*, language, young children

1. INTRODUCTION

Language, as a fundamentally human characteristic, plays a crucial role in shaping our experiences and educational trajectories (Tang & Calafato, 2024). The importance of developing early language and literacy skills is acknowledged by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a global human rights issue. Indeed, research suggests that language abilities are foundational for a host of cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes. Therefore, it is critical to provide experiences that foster language acquisition across early learning settings (Finders, Wilson & Duncan, 2023). In

fact, the cultivation of language competence is widely regarded as a fundamental dimension of early childhood education, given its central role in children's overall learning and development. In Taiwan, the Ministry of Education's *Kindergarten Curriculum Standards* (1987) formally designated language as one of the six major curricular domains, alongside health, play, music, work, and general knowledge. This emphasis was further reinforced in the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* (2017), which identified language, together with physical movement and health, cognition, social development, emotional growth, and aesthetic appreciation, as the six essential learning domains.

Beyond policy directives, early childhood education scholars have consistently devoted attention to the processes, challenges, and strategies related to children’s language development. Collectively, these developments underscore the significance of language learning as both an educational policy priority and a sustained focus of academic inquiry in Taiwan’s early childhood education (Pan, 2014). Therefore, this article seeks to examine the language domain in Taiwan’s Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework, with a particular focus on its goals and content.

2. DOMAIN OBJECTIVES

In an educational landscape of rapid change, marked by constant change and the need for innovation, Teachers play a central role in improving pedagogical practices and learning (Sosa and Silva, 2025). In addition, curriculum development is essential in education, and preschool teachers are the indispensable element of curriculum development in early childhood education (Shih & Chang, 2023). Furthermore, in the development process of early childhood language education curricula in Taiwan, teachers need to understand the goals of language education. Domain objectives in the curriculum are as follows: (1) Experience and become aware of the fun and functions of language. (2) Appropriately participate in everyday social interaction situations. (3) Develop the habit of narrating experiences and weaving stories. (4) Enjoy reading and expressing personal viewpoints. (5) Understand and appreciate the use of multiple languages in society. These objectives reflect a constructivist orientation toward learning, emphasizing that language development emerges through active engagement, social interaction, and meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978). Pedagogically, teachers can employ play-based and story-centered approaches that integrate oral language, reading, and creative expression, enabling children to use language as a tool for communication and thought. Dialogic teaching strategies, grounded in socio-cultural theory, further encourage children to negotiate meaning and co-construct understanding through interaction with peers and adults. In addition, incorporating multicultural and multilingual materials supports the fifth objective by fostering positive

attitudes toward linguistic diversity and cultural pluralism. Through reflective and intentional teaching, early childhood educators can thus cultivate children’s curiosity, empathy, and communicative competence—laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning and social participation in their future (Shih, 2018a, 2018b; Ye & Shih, 2021; Wu, 2024).

3. CONTENT: LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Language can be conceptualized as a social communication system, through which individuals construct meaning, share experiences, and develop social relationships. Even before birth, infants are immersed in this communicative environment, and upon birth, they formally enter this social system of communication. The period between ages two and six is a particularly critical stage for children to learn how to participate effectively, appropriately, and joyfully in this system. During this developmental phase, children encounter numerous opportunities to experience and explore language, discovering both its pleasures and its communicative functions. For instance, they may recognize repeated sounds in nursery rhymes or identify meaningful symbols within their surroundings. As they observe adults using written and visual symbols to record information, children begin to invent their own symbolic systems to express thoughts and experiences. In daily life, children engage in various forms of social interaction, gradually learning to interpret verbal and nonverbal cues while developing the ability to respond appropriately. Through group discussions and cooperative activities, they cultivate listening and expression skills, which are essential for mutual understanding and meaning-making. In preschool settings, children are provided with abundant opportunities to narrate their life experiences. Through sharing, they strengthen their sense of self and deepen their understanding of others (Halliday, 1975). Collaborative storytelling with peers and educators allows children to enter imaginative worlds, promoting both cognitive flexibility and emotional expression. Regular engagement with stories—listening, reading, and dramatizing—encourages them to appreciate the beauty of language and to respond creatively through drawings,

performances, and dialogue (Bruner, 1983; Ministry of Education, 2017; Wells, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978).

The domain of language learning encompasses multiple dimensions, including bodily expression, oral language, visual symbols, and written forms. These dimensions serve as the communicative media through which individuals and texts convey meaning within the broader communication system. Even simple bodily gestures can express many socially agreed-upon meanings, while more complex movements hold the potential to become forms of artistic creation. In fact, people frequently integrate body movements and spoken language to express needs, emotions, feelings, and thoughts—both in everyday interactions and in dramatic play activities. Beyond the expressive function of gestures, the phonological features of oral language and the varied linguistic environments within society are also key focal points in children’s learning. Visual symbols are ubiquitous in daily life, functioning as indicators, reminders, or explanatory signs. In picture books, images serve as aesthetic symbols, often working in conjunction with text to tell stories. Written language, meanwhile, provides means for recording, remembering, and concretizing thought. Through the process of learning to recognize these functions, young children also begin to create their own symbols as a form of self-expression. When these competencies and learning dimensions are interwoven, the essential content and direction of language learning in early childhood become clear. They include: (1) Comprehending body language; (2) Comprehending spoken language; (3) Comprehending visual symbols; (4) Understanding the functions of written language; (5) Expressing through body language; (6) Expressing through spoken language; (7) Expressing through visual symbols. These interrelated dimensions reveal that early childhood language learning is a multifaceted process that integrates communication, creativity, and symbolic understanding, laying a foundation for both linguistic and aesthetic development (Ministry of Education, 2017).

4. REFLECTIONS: THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

4.1 Theoretical Foundations

Language learning is not merely a process of acquiring cognitive and symbolic systems but also a process of socialization and cultural participation. From a social interactionist perspective, children’s language development is profoundly shaped by the cultural contexts and social practices in which they live. Vygotsky (1978) identified language as a mediational tool for cognitive development. Through interactions with adults and peers, children internalize the social norms and cultural meanings of language, gradually forming individualized modes of thinking. This suggests that the essence of early language learning lies in participating in the dialogic practices of a community, rather than engaging solely in phonetic or lexical training. Bruner (1983) further emphasized the role of narrative thinking in children’s cognitive development. Through narrating and representing lived experiences, children not only acquire linguistic structures but also construct meaningful connections between the self and the world. This perspective highlights the significance of storytelling and narrative play as central pedagogical tools in fostering children’s linguistic and cognitive growth.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications

Bruner’s and Vygotsky’s insights provide meaningful directions for curriculum and instructional design in early childhood education. Educators should create authentic and contextually rich learning environments that promote children’s active engagement with language. Activities such as story theatre, dialogue journals, and role-play allow children to use language in emotionally resonant and imaginative contexts (Bruner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, Halliday’s (1975) *functional theory of language learning* underscores that language performs multiple social functions, including expressing emotions, maintaining interpersonal relationships, conveying information, and organizing experience. When educators intentionally guide children to experience these diverse communicative functions, they help them use language

more flexibly and appropriately in various social contexts. For instance, during “sharing time” activities, children learn to describe personal experiences, interact with peers, and adjust their language according to situational demands—developing both pragmatic competence and socio-emotional understanding.

4.3 The Aesthetic Dimension of Language Learning

From the perspective of aesthetic education, language learning can also be regarded as an aesthetic experience. When children engage with rhyme, rhythm, symbolism, and imagery, they encounter the musicality and creativity inherent in language. Wells (1999) suggested that through participation in literature and dramatic performance, children cultivate linguistic sensitivity and expressive creativity through emotional resonance. Such experiences transform language learning into an artistic and life-enriching process that nurtures imagination, empathy, and aesthetic appreciation.

5. CONCLUSION: CREATING A COMMUNICATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The fundamental principle of implementing language-related educational activities in early childhood settings is to create a learning environment where children enjoy communication. Such an environment should include individuals who appreciate and habitually use language, engaging texts that invite continuous exploration, and a comfortable space that encourages expressive experimentation. Teachers play a crucial role in this process; they must themselves be enthusiastic and inquisitive communicators—expressive in body language, oral communication, storytelling, and reading. This enthusiasm and curiosity foster a classroom atmosphere that motivates children to continuously explore language in diverse and meaningful ways. Within this communicative space, children use body movements, spoken words, or visual symbols to achieve meaningful purposes (e.g., creating a shopping list to facilitate a pretend-purchase activity) or to solve problems encountered in daily life and learning (e.g., discussing and presenting classroom rules for various activity areas). Through such experiences, children engage in

purposeful language use, developing awareness and understanding of multiple modes of communication and expression. To nurture this type of learning atmosphere, teachers are encouraged to employ dynamic and multimodal communication strategies, integrating gestures, spoken language, and visual representations. Three main types of texts are recommended as core communicative materials in the learning environment: (1) children’s literature rich in aesthetics, emotion, and linguistic rhythm, whether presented through sound, print, or visual media; (2) records of shared life experiences between teachers and children, such as illustrated journals or documentation of field trips; and (3) co-constructed texts emerging from learning contexts, including project plans, shopping lists, or collaborative storytelling charts. Language use occurs continuously in children’s daily lives—it is not confined to activities explicitly designed for language learning. For children aged two to six to develop a genuine interest in communicating with others and interacting with diverse texts, the kindergarten environment must be holistically designed to promote curiosity and communicative confidence. This involves fostering an exploratory classroom atmosphere and cultivating an interactional culture where children feel safe to make mistakes and express themselves freely (Ministry of Education, 2017).

In summary, language is one of few cognitive abilities unique to our species. However, language has neither evolved nor does it exist in isolation from other cognitive and neural machinery. One of the fundamental issues in cognitive science is the extent to which specifically linguistic mechanisms and representations underpin our knowledge of language and the way it is learned (Culbertson & Kirby, 2016; Fedorenko, 2014; Spolsky, 2012). Young children have strong learning abilities because of their high neural plasticity and ability to imitate, and they are driven by curiosity. Preschool teachers providing developmentally appropriate learning environments, equipment, and activities for young children can positively affect their language development. Young children’s language development before the age of six years is vital, and improving their oral expression skills is essential as their organs develop and they encounter different experiences (Shao & Shih, 2024;

Shih, 2024). Enabling young children to engage with and understand local culture during language learning, fostering cultural identity and an appreciation for multiculturalism (Liu et al, 2025). Furthermore, early childhood language education should transcend a skill-based approach and move toward an integrated pedagogy that encompasses social interaction, cultural meaning, and aesthetic experience. Through open dialogue, collaborative learning, and creative expression, educators can help children become meaningful participants in the linguistic and cultural communities they inhabit. In doing so, language learning becomes not only a cognitive pursuit but also a deeply social, emotional, and humanistic experience.

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