

Investigating Instructional Practices, Supports, and Learning Needs of Dual Language Learners in New York City UPK Classrooms

Tiedan Huang, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
thuang15@fordham.edu
(212) 636-6453

Chun Zhang, Ph.D.
Professor
czhang@fordham.edu
(212) 636-7236

Caitlin Coe
Doctoral Candidate
ccoe1@fordham.edu
(212) 636-6477

Graduate School of Education
Fordham University

Abstract

The study examined how well New York City's universal prekindergarten (UPK) programs served dual language learners (DLLs). Using stratified random sampling, we selected 50 UPK classrooms across the city that differed in program delivery model, resource provision, and concentration of dual language learners. Using structured, direct observations, we examined the program quality as defined by emotional support, classroom management and instructional support. Further, we examined the extent to which teachers nurtured a culturally responsive environment and supported DLLs' acquisition of English and home language.

Our analyses demonstrated New York City's UPK classrooms typically provided strong emotional support and were well-organized. While recognizing the generally positive learning environment, we also noticed that most UPK teachers were challenged to provide the necessary instructional support to promote children's higher-order thinking skills and to facilitate their language development. This need for professional development is particularly pronounced in supporting DLLs' English and home language acquisition.

Research Questions

1. What was the typical classroom quality experienced by children attending a UPK program in New York City?
2. Were high quality experiences equally distributed across the city?
3. What were the different types of UPK classrooms based on our observation?
4. What was the typical quality experienced by DLLs in New York City UPK classrooms?
5. Did different types of UPK classrooms provide different support to DLLs in New York City UPK classrooms?

Research Methods

- Study design: Quantitative, descriptive
- Sampling method: stratified random sampling
- Sample size: 50 classrooms from 50 UPK sites
- Instruments: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); Classroom Assessment of Supports for English Language Acquisition (CASELA)
- Procedure: (1) Researchers were trained by certified trainers to use both instruments; (2) Observers established reliability prior to site visits; (3) Observers conducted multiple

cycles of observations, or extended and repeated visits to each site, to gather quality evidence.

- Data analyses: (1) Descriptive statistics; (2) Cluster analysis; and (3) MANOVA.

Summary of Results

- Our New York City sample performed similarly to the national norm in the areas of emotional support (5.94 vs. 6.08), classroom management (5.59 vs. 5.80), and instructional support (3.02 vs. 2.96).
- Our sample performed relatively stronger in emotional support (mean score of 5.94 on a 7-point scale) and in classroom management (mean score of 5.60), and relatively weaker in instructional support (mean score of 3.02).
- Three types of sites were identified using cluster analysis. What distinguished the sites most were metrics related to classroom management followed by instructional support and emotional support. Further, the three domains of teacher-student interactions were interdependent. Sites that thrived in one domain tended to do relatively well in the other two domains.
- The three types of sites identified through cluster analysis provided significantly different degrees of teacher support for DLLs (as measured by CASELA), specifically in the area of English language acquisition.

Implications for Practice and Policy

- Direct classroom observation provides an evidence-based approach to document and improve teachers' practices and children's educational experiences.
- Teachers will benefit from professional development focused on **instructional support**, specifically in the areas of concept development, quality feedback to children, and language modeling.
- Teachers who support DLLs require comprehensive professional development, which includes strategies for learning about DLL children and their families, for creating a culturally responsive environment, and for helping DLL children acquire both home and English proficiency.