

A comparative study on the Kindergarten evaluation system between Taiwan and Hong Kong

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Abstract

This study uses the comparative education theory proposed by G. Z. F. Bereday with the aim of analyzing the kindergarten accreditation system of Taiwan and Hong Kong. Interviews were accomplished with school administrators, scholars (experts) who are responsible for the kindergarten accreditation in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Results show that within cities and counties in Taiwan, the kindergarten and pre-school counseling are considered to be temporarily evaluation, and while some counties even uses a parallel system of evaluation and early childhood education counseling program. However, in Hong Kong, evaluation has been ongoing already for the past several years. In Taiwan, evaluation is mostly regarded negatively, while in Hong Kong evaluation is regarded as a positive undertaking.

Keywords: educational evaluation; academic performance; early childhood education; comparative study; accountability

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1. Introduction

The development of kindergartens in Hong Kong is very similar to that in Taiwan; both apply Chinese as main language with comparable financial standards. Currently the kindergarten evaluation system in Hong Kong has progressed to the state of using voucher program as the basis for kindergarten accepting comprehensive evaluation that merits further study. Among the existing Taiwanese literature regarding kindergarten evaluation, the majority adopts comparative research method and fewer studies emphasize on the comparative research for kindergarten evaluation systems between different nations. The study intends to discuss the kindergarten evaluation system to compare in-depth the content and relevant issues for kindergarten evaluation systems between Taiwan and Hong Kong. The purpose of the study aims to compare the similarity and difference of evaluation purpose, plan, index, data collection methods, staff, preparation work, self-evaluation of school, external visits, and results and applications between the kindergarten evaluation systems of Taiwan and Hong Kong. The study proposes conclusion and recommendation as reference for relevant units and policy formulation.

Initial research objectives are as follows: 1.) To understand the underlying factors and current situation of the Kindergarten accreditation system in Taiwan, 2.) To understand the underlying factors and current situation of the Kindergarten accreditation system in Hong Kong, and 3.) To accomplished a comparative analysis of the two accreditation systems; taking note of their differences and similarities.

1.1 Terminologies

Quality Review: A term referring to establishing kindergarten evaluation in Hong Kong. After kindergartens conducts self-evaluation, the supervisor of Education Bureau and professional personnel meeting evaluation eligibility shall take external evaluation in kindergarten and review the results of self-evaluation. Quality Review Framework is a set of established kindergarten quality performance indicators (Curriculum Development Council of Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006).

2. Literature Review

As of 2008, Taiwan's total of 3,195 public and private kindergartens, private kindergartens little more than public kindergartens. Since 2001, the children attending kindergartens has declined, Four to six the total number of 170,765 children are the most numbers of children up to the total in 2001, also tended to decrease after. In the eleven years of the time, the numbers of public and private kindergartens in Taiwan have changed; public kindergarten was increasing year by year, private kindergarten increase the largest in 2003, and then tended to decrease. The number of public kindergartens is the most in 2008, the 1,544 total are more than about 110, however, the number of children than in 2002, reduced by about 4,000, shows that more parents can choose public or private kindergartens. The number of private kindergartens is decreasing, reaching 1,948 by the most up to 2003, and only 1651 at least in 2008, the Number of children is less more than 40,000 children than 2001, As can be seen the difficulties faced by kindergarten from these figures (Jiang, 2002).

2.1 Evaluation in Taiwan

An evaluation is to understand the situation of kindergartens and nursery schools in order to clarify the undetected situation of institute itself through a manner of external evaluation, to discover those kindergartens, nursery schools with a concern in teaching feature and child needs and to reward and to commend them

accordingly (Chou & Chiang, 1995). It also helps eliminate the flaws of those kindergartens, nursery schools that require operations improvement; the government shall aims to enable a complete ecology and development of child care quality upon the establishment of evaluation system. In some other country, evaluation is also known as *accreditation*. In the United States, the term *accreditation* is most often used with reference to schools and hospitals. Accreditation of these institutions is performed by private nonprofit membership associations known as accrediting agencies. These agencies which are consist of private educational associations of regional or national scope; develops evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. Institutions and/or programs that request an agency's evaluation and that meet an agency's criteria are then accredited by that agency (DOE, 2008). In sum, accreditation is a system for recognizing educational institutions and professional programs for a level of performance, integrity and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public.

In Taiwan, the Taiwan Accreditation Foundation (TAF) is the only national accreditation body in Taiwan. TAF accreditation recognizes and promotes organizations by assessing, against international standards and criteria, their competence in providing specific types of certification, calibration, testing, inspection and proficiency testing programmed services (TAF, 2011). TAF is more focused on the industry, while the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) is more on education (HEEACT, 2008). However, still the evaluation mechanism in the educational institutions of Taiwan is controlled by the Ministry of Education.

2.2 Evolution and Development of Kindergartens in Taiwan

Due to the recent trend of low-birth rate in Taiwan, the number of children enrolling in school also shows a declining trend each year. The challenging business of kindergarten and the increase in the number of public kindergartens also affects the ecological changes in private kindergartens. While the number of children attending public kindergarten shows little change, the number of children attending private kindergarten shows a declining trending. Parents are more likely to screen kindergartens by taking high quality and refined early childhood education more into consideration when faced with a declining number of children. In addition to providing better education for children, regardless of public or private kindergartens, should engage in the reflection and planning for future development and provide services with more professional quality standards (Wang, Yang, & Zheng, 2005).

2.3 Evolution and Development of Kindergartens in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong government encourages the private for kindergarten, as the basis for the development of kindergarten policy; yet so far of the government-sponsored or government-funded kindergarten in Hong Kong. The kindergartens in Hong Kong provide three-years education programs in schools for children over three years old in Hong Kong Special Administration Region. It does not belong to the scope of Hong Kong nine-year free education, required to pay tuition fees. The kindergarten in Hong Kong is an important stage of learning before the nine-year basic education (Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau, 2007). The Hong Kong government annual funding is about \$1.1 billion to subsidy kindergarten. The Hong Kong government subside the education and training of principals and teachers to enhance their professional ability. The kindergartens have to furnish information for public reference. The purpose of kindergarten education let the children through various activities and life experience to balance physical, intellectual, language, sociability, emotional and aesthetic development in a pleasant environment. The most of the kindergartens in Hong Kong using two kinds of texts and three languages, two kinds of texts means Chinese and English, three languages means to use Chinese and English and Cantonese be the teaching languages (Hong Kong Government, 1981).

Table 1*Kindergarten Overview table from 1998 to 2009 in Hong Kong*

Year	General	International	The total number of Kindergartens	The total number of children
1998/1999	715	29	744	175,073
1999/2000	727	29	756	171,138
2000/2001	756	33	789	160,921
2001/2002	746	38	784	156,202
2002/2003	730	47	777	143,725
2003/2004	719	49	768	136,096
2004/2005	683	54	737	130,157
2005/2006	986	76	1,062	149,141
2006/2007	941	74	1,015	140,783
2007/2008	912	74	986	138,393
2008/2009	889	75	964	137,630

Data source: The Hong Kong Education Bureau

The Hong Kong Government has long lacked supervision and supports for kindergartens and it was only until 1995 when the Government launched the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS) to provide subsidies for for-profit kindergartens. After the return to China, Hong Kong also proposed regulations for the qualifications of qualified pre-school teachers in the first policy address, that the education system will undergo a comprehensive review to improve the overall service quality. The Education Commission recommended strengthening of kindergarten evaluation mechanism in expectation to help the next-generation acquire quality education from quality schools (Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau, 2007).

2.4 The contents of the kindergarten evaluation system

The object of evaluation is to help kindergartens to self-realize the current status, then with the external evaluation to clarify the status what the kindergartens not awarded, Praise the kindergartens with excellent teaching characteristics and consider to the needs of children after evaluation, give prize money to encourage them and assist the pending improved kindergartens to removal of deletion. The government set the kindergarten evaluation system may aim to promote the kindergartens quality to have a sound ecological development. For the kindergarten, if the kindergartens benefit from the kindergarten evaluation, then are affirmed to more parents, evaluation will be the panacea. Kindergarten evaluation system is composed of evaluation personnel, evaluation object, evaluation tool, evaluation process, awards and punishment ways and so on, smooth operation of all sectors will achieve to view the quality of kindergarten services, security management and professional service, Be rated as outstanding kindergarten, even should pay more to award, As for the kindergarten which is not good rated should be more assisted guidance and assistance to improve and pursuit of growth.

3. Methodology

The study makes a comparison between the kindergarten evaluation systems in Taiwan and Hong Kong through document analysis with adoption of the Comparative Method in Education advocated by George Bereday (1964), in order to analyze the determine the differences, similarities, strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics.

3.1 Document Analysis

The study arranges the laws and regulation, evaluation systems, statistics, research reports, books, papers, website data, and official website information from Ministry of Education (Education Bureau) related to the

kindergarten evaluation systems in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The data are described and classified before taking into final discussion and analysis.

3.2 *Comparative Method in Educational Research*

Bereday (1964) mentioned in his book, *Comparative Method in Education* that the comparative methods in education consist of four stages: 1.) Description: Referring to preparing a catalogue on collected data according to research purpose; 2.) Interpretation: Referring to explain the data collected; 3.) Juxtaposition: Classifying and sorting the educational facts from previous two stages; and 4.) Comparison: Apply synchronization analysis on educational facts from previous stage. The purpose of the research will be analysis and compare the kindergarten evaluation system between Taiwan and Hong Kong, the key issues include the evaluation object, evaluation program, evaluation indicator, evaluation personnel, evaluation data collect method, evaluation pre-visit, self-evaluation process, external-visit evaluation, evaluation outcome report and applications.

4. **Comparative Analysis of Kindergarten Evaluation Systems between Taiwan and Hong Kong**

Taiwan offers incentives to schools with outstanding evaluation performance; nonetheless such incentives do not improve the overall kindergarten quality. Under the supports of voucher program, kindergartens in Hong Kong accepts evaluation visits with relatively less negative response by targeting for receiving the voucher program.

- Purpose of Evaluation: Kindergartens in Taiwan attaining outstanding performance may receive spiritual and symbolic recognition while kindergartens in Hong Kong receive voucher program by passing the evaluation.
- Evaluation Program: Each year in Taiwan before the evaluation, the evaluation program will be proposed and counties and cities to formulate their own evaluation program. In Hong Kong, the evaluation is implemented in single program.
- Evaluation Model: Taiwan emphasizes on process and results when Hong Kong provides pre-counseling, self-evaluation.
- Evaluation Indicators: The projects for evaluation in Taiwan apply open questions as indicators while Hong Kong review with 4 scope and 202 sub-questions.
- Preparation before Evaluation: Both Taiwan and Hong Kong hold briefing to explain all affairs while the captain of Hong Kong evaluation team makes pre-evaluation communication. The pre-evaluation workshop in Taiwan is considerably important which aims to maintain consistency in inter-rater reliability. Nonetheless in Hong Kong, a group of professional supervisors will proceed with the evaluation, hence reducing the need for organizing evaluation staff and pre-evaluation workshops. Hong Kong is only required to submit reports and questionnaire results while Taiwan needs to conduct self-evaluation on evaluation criteria before the evaluation takes place.
- Evaluation Staff: The evaluation staff of Hong Kong consists of supervisors while Taiwan needs to organize consensus camps before each evaluation.
- Self-Evaluation Process for Kindergartens: The self-evaluation for Taiwan does not require much work to be completed while the scope of self-evaluation for Hong Kong expands to parent questionnaire data.
- Collection Method for Evaluation Data: The data collection method for Taiwan is mainly based on the review on interview with staff in kindergartens and supporting information while Hong Kong requires the same plus parent interview.

- External Interview Evaluation: It takes half day to 1 day for conducting evaluation in Taiwan it takes 2~3 days to complete the evaluation in Hong Kong.
- Evaluation Results and Applications: Both Taiwan and Hong Kong present reports in qualitative methods; whereas Hong Kong shows complete content of evaluation reports online readily for everyone. The comparison of the two regions shows that the information in Hong Kong is more accessible.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Similarity of Kindergarten Evaluation Systems between Taiwan and Hong Kong

- Make public the evaluation plans and standards on websites: Both Taiwan and Hong Kong publish evaluation program on the website of Ministry of Education or Education Bureau before conducting the evaluation.
- Hold conferences in advance to explain the kindergarten evaluation, for a better communication and mutual understanding: Both Taiwan and Hong Kong hold briefings before the evaluation; whereas Hong Kong holds workshops or seminars lasting for few days while Taiwan spends one-day evaluation standard briefing to explain the evaluation criteria.
- Conduct self-assessments prior to official evaluations: Taiwan's kindergartens must undergo self-evaluation based on evaluation criteria before the program.
- The evaluation report is based on qualitative interpretation: Both the kindergarten evaluation reports for Taiwan and Hong Kong communicated evaluation results in texts.

5.2 Difference between kindergarten evaluation system in Taiwan and Hong Kong

- On-going process of evaluation tasks: The majority of county and urban kindergartens in Taiwan apply preschool counseling to temporarily replace evaluation while the evaluation tasks in Hong Kong continue in stability.
- Different mentality of evaluation: Taiwan's kindergartens often treat evaluation as troublesome and painful errand, and the majority are hold the mentality of resistance towards evaluations. The kindergarten evaluation in Hong Kong is based on incentives of voucher program for evaluations; hence the kindergartens are more open and willing to accept evaluation.
- Different design concepts for evaluation criteria: The evaluation criteria in Taiwan are more diverse due to the counties and cities have the option to develop their own standards while the evaluation of Hong Kong is comprehensive and uniform. The evaluation criteria of Taiwan appear to be simpler with content consisting open projects, while the evaluation criteria in Hong Kong contains more considerable content and numerous questions.
- Full-time evaluation staff and diversity in professional background: The county and city evaluation staff in Taiwan work in part-time while Hong Kong evaluation employs supervisors to conduct evaluation with considerably highly reliability.
- Pre-evaluation counseling system: The pre-evaluation visits in Taiwan vary according to the development of each county and city. Two weeks before the evaluation, the captain of evaluation team in Hong Kong will visit the kindergarten ahead of time to understand the current situation and the matters of mutual coordination in the process of evaluation communication.

- Different period of self-evaluation and work requirement: The self-evaluation period in Taiwan starts from the acceptance of evaluation notification while the self-evaluation in Hong Kong follows a specific timetable and procedures for evaluation, in addition to specific details on the document collection and questionnaire analysis of kindergartens.
- Different length of on-going period for external evaluation: The evaluation period for kindergarten in Taiwan can be as short as half day with the longest in less than 1 day. The evaluation period in Hong Kong could last up to 3 days.
- Different applications of evaluation results: The evaluation results in Taiwan are divided into outstanding performers rewarded with recognition and awards while the poor performers are classified into counseling. Hong Kong on the other hand offers voucher subsidy for kindergartens passing the evaluation while those failing the evaluation will be given counseling.

5.3 Recommendation

Early Childhood Education Policy

- Establish full-time evaluation institutions: Establish institution center to promote evaluation work for kindergartens.
- Evaluation Staff Selection and Training: Offer training for evaluation staff and establish a Think Tank for evaluation staff. The staff will undergo a training session lasting from 4 days to one week, including theory, concepts of ethics and actual evaluation to improve the quality of evaluation staff and to reach consistency reliability of raters.
- Re-launch and proceed with evaluation work: The agencies governing early childhood education must prepare budgeting and planning before conducting evaluation, to provide children, parents and all personnel contributing efforts in early children education with confidence for quality of early childhood education.
- Provide reference for formulation of Daycare Integration Policy: Provide an increasing number of studies on kindergarten policy and system from different countries in the future as reference for establishing domestic daycare integration system.

Practical Aspects of Evaluation System

- Visit and evaluation period should take into consideration of kindergarten scale and evaluation criteria: The period for kindergarten evaluation should take into consideration of kindergarten scale and evaluation criteria in order to determine the time for evaluation and to accomplish the evaluation objectives.
- Evaluation criteria with flexibility: The government, experts and scholars, kindergartens, parents and related personnel may propose comments for evaluation criteria, before formulating revisions on evaluation criteria for next cycle.
- Assure accomplishment of evaluation purpose: Respond to evaluation purpose with evaluation results while concurrently taking into consideration of ideal and reality aspects. The evaluation contractors should require kindergartens to undergo periodic self-evaluation rather than beginning preparation of relevant data on the year of evaluation.
- Strengthen the depth of self-evaluation: Upon establishing evaluation system, prioritize self-evaluation as the foremost important preparation for kindergarten.

- Application and reports of evaluation results should be published: Publish kindergarten evaluation results and reports on county or city government websites so parents could take into consideration when choosing schools. Information such as administrative management, faculty, environment and facilities, and teaching characteristics, should be maintained and updated in the long run.
- Actual follow-up and counseling: Set specifications for kindergartens within 5 years after evaluation to propose annual self-evaluation each year while the evaluation staff will also visit unexpectedly without prior notice to supervise the kindergarten with continuous maintenance of current situations with further pursuit of advancement.

Future Research Directions

- Increase the number of researches and reference from kindergarten education evaluation system from other countries: Scholars and experts in the field of early childhood education must place importance on this issue with more diversified research and increase in research quantity.
- Apply different research methods in research analysis: Further research on the key content of evaluation implementation should be focused with reference to the evaluation system and implementation overview related to domestic and foreign kindergarten education so to provide learning criteria for kindergarten evaluation in Taiwan.

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