A Project entitled

A case study of trilingual education in an international kindergarten in Hong Kong

submitted by

Pan Yi-Ling

submitted to The Education University of Hong Kong

For the degree of *Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education)*

in *March, 2025*

Declaration

I, *Pan Yi-Ling* (   ), declare that this research report represents my own work under the supervision of *Dr. Xiong Weiyan*, and that it has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

Signed

Pan Yi-Ling

March 26, 2025

Abstract

The introduction of the 'Biliterate and Trilingual' (兩文三語) language policy in 1997 has contributed to the rise of trilingual education being implemented in Hong Kong kindergartens where three different languages are being taught to children. Studies have shown that implementing a double immersion program in the early years would lead to the children acquiring a higher proficiency in a second language (Genesee & Lambert, 1983; Li, 2022). This case study investigates the implementation of trilingual education in an international kindergarten in Hong Kong, looking closely at the kindergarten's curriculum(s) aspects and objectives, the time allocated to each language, and the teaching methodologies employed. In addition to analyzing kindergarten documents such as the kindergarten booklet, school schedule, and French curriculum objectives, one school director and two language teachers are interviewed to understand further the kindergarten's operation and educators' views on trilingual education. The results show that the kindergarten adopts a system that authorizes the parents to curate their child's language learning experiences while implementing an early multilingual immersion program where the languages French, English, and Mandarin are allocated into a 50/30/20 program. Furthermore, the kindergarten applies a combination of the French, EYFS, and HK kindergarten curriculums, where each curriculum is used for the most suited language.

Keywords: Trilingual Education, International Curriculum, Medium of Instruction (MOI)

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1. Introduction

Starting from the introduction of the 'Biliterate and Trilingual' (兩文三語) language policy in 1997, Hong Kong (HK) kindergartens have been making an effort to apply trilingual education to their school curriculum. To understand how trilingual education is being implemented in HK, this project aims to investigate an international kindergarten in HK. Specifically, this study aims to look into the views of the educators (principal/director and language teachers) on trilingual education and the methods and pedagogies they use to implement it.

Over the past few decades, there have been several attempts to research the implementation and challenges of trilingual education in HK kindergartens. The internationalism of HK is shown through its deep roots in promoting a 'Biliterate and Trilingual' language policy, which can be traced back to the handover of HK in 1997 (Li, 2022). English was the official language from 1841 to 1997 during British rule, while Cantonese was the unofficial spoken language. After the takeover, the addition of Putonghua or Mandarin is practiced. Since then, the HK government has introduced the language policy. This policy aims to nurture their citizens to be proficient in reading comprehension and written English and Chinese and increase competency in their communication in Cantonese, Putonghua, and English (Li, 2017).

1.1. Difference Between Local and International Kindergarten

Two types of kindergartens in Hong Kong, local and international, differ in various ways. The first is that international kindergartens in HK are designed to cater to non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children, while local schools are more for Chinese-speaking children. This is due to the

fact that the medium of instruction in local kindergartens is Chinese (CMI). In contrast, international kindergartens adopt mediums of instruction that are different from Chinese, such as English (EMI), Japanese, or French (GovHK, 2024).

The curriculum of these two types of kindergarten practices also varies. The local kindergarten follows the "Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide" provided by the Curriculum Development Council (2017). The HK kindergarten curriculum guide focuses on child-centredness, where the child can freely explore their interests. Moreover, the HK curriculum guide targets six learning areas: physical fitness and health, language (Chinese and English), early childhood mathematics, nature and living, self and society, and arts and creativity.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP), and Montessori are the names of a few curriculums that are more widely applied in international kindergartens. The EYFS curriculum emphasizes standards for educators to ensure that the children acquire knowledge and grow well based on the framework they provide (DoE, 2024). The IB PYP focuses on "children's inquiry-led and play-based learning" as well as the development of the Learner Profile Attributes of inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective (IBO, 2014). Lastly, the Montessori curriculum provides five key curriculum areas: practical life, sensorial, mathematics, language, and cultural studies, where the children can move forward at their own pace based on their developmental stage and interests (MA, 2024).

1.2. Research Purpose and Question

While considerable attention is paid to the various pedagogies implemented in trilingual education in HK kindergartens, more research needs to be done to understand the implementation of trilingual education in international kindergartens in HK. The local kindergartens in HK adopted the Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide developed by the HK Education Bureau (EB, 2024). On the other hand, the international kindergartens in HK follow a non-local curriculum, which mainly includes EYFS, IB, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia curriculum. The teaching approaches would differ since the local and international kindergartens implement different curriculums. This brings us to the point of wanting to comprehend further how an international curriculum would operate in a trilingual education.

There is a difference between local and international kindergartens' medium of instruction (MOI). Local kindergartens use Cantonese as their MOI. In contrast, international kindergartens adopt other languages, such as English or Japanese, since they are made for non-Chinese speaking children (HK Government, 2023). Most research generally focuses on trilingual education in all kinds of HK kindergartens.

Therefore, this research paper aims to investigate the implementation of trilingual education in an international kindergarten in HK. More specifically, the curriculum aspects of the kindergartens, looking closely at the curricular objectives, language instruction times, and the teaching pedagogies of the three languages. A case study approach will be utilized to achieve these research objectives.

To that end, the following research question was addressed in this study: "How is trilingual education applied in an international kindergarten curriculum in Hong Kong?"

1.3.   Definitions of Key Terms

1.3.1. Trilingual Education

Different scholars have their variations in defining trilingual education. Cenoz & Genesee (1998) described a trilingual student as someone who can use three different languages to communicate verbally and in written form. McArthur (1992) expressed that having the ability to utilize three or more languages in diverse degrees can be categorized as a "multilingual" person. Whether a person was taught three languages from birth or was a bilingual who learned a third language later, they are all conclusively known as trilingual. Trilingual education is defined further as an education that promotes the learning of three different languages. This is similar to Cenez and Jessner's (2009) definition of "trilingual education involves[ing] the use of three languages as languages of instruction" (p. 121). From these definitions of being trilingual, it can be concluded that being trilingual means having the ability to use three languages in oral and written form.

1.3.2. Curriculum

Schools can choose which curriculum they would like to implement that would correlate with their mission statement and vision of the school. Whether they apply an international or local curriculum, the curriculum utilized should further develop the students' learning. Egan (2003) stated that the student's needs or interests substantially impact the curriculum content. Moreover, teachers are known as "facilitators" who orchestrate students learning through activities instead of merely transferring knowledge to children (Egan, 2003). Teachers use pedagogies to engage students in meaningful learning in a curriculum. On the other hand, teaching materials are tools that teachers use to implement the pedagogies. Under the curriculum, assessments assist the teachers in understanding the students' current learning progress (RI DoE,

2023). The curriculum would generally consist of pedagogies, teaching materials, and assessments to support students' interests and needs.

1.3.3. Medium of Instruction

Medium of instruction, or MOI, is the language(s) utilized to execute the curriculum, which can be found in both formal and informal educational settings (UNESCO, 2006). As globalization becomes more prominent, the influence of English as an MOI is increasing exponentially. Additionally, the Mandarin language is becoming a popular MOI in places like Asia.

Similar to the curriculum, the schools can decide the MOI based on their mission and vision. Furthermore, the MOI may differ based on where the school is located. For instance, schools in Hong Kong would enact bilingual or trilingual education due to the "biliterate and trilingual" language policy. Bilingual education is the utilization of two languages, while trilingual education is the usage of three languages. Hamid et al. (2013) express that "MOI cannot be decontextualized from its social, geographical and historical context" (p. 3). This means that MOI is heavily intertwined with the socio-historical identity of the country of origin. Inferring that where the school is situated will help determine the MOI(s) of the school.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Biliterate and Trilingual Language Policy

Acquiring a third language is common in multilingual classrooms and communities such as Africa and Asia (Rubagumya, 1994; Tickoo, 1996). The students in multilingual classrooms and communities can speak the language from home, the language spoken in the community, and the additional language taught in school. In HK, the Chinese language is written in the traditional script (繁体字) that is closely related to the simplified script (简体字) of Putonghua, while the spoken Chinese language is Cantonese. Li (2022) expresses that Chinese characters are generally pronounceable in Cantonese and Putonghua. However, there are specific Cantonese words that are typically not accepted as Standard Written Chinese (SWC, 標準中文). Therefore, spoken Cantonese is not as recognized as Putonghua. Overall, this demonstrates how the Chinese language in HK is separated into the traditional script for written form and Cantonese for spoken form.

English language education in Hong Kong dates back to the mid-nineteenth century when missionary schools were first established (Boyle, 1997). During that time, the growth of English education was primarily caused due to the communication gap between the British administration and the local Chinese community. As Hong Kong grew into an international city, the English language became more significant as it is a means of communication, provides business opportunities with the West, and supports academic studies (Boyle, 1997; Pennington, 1998; Kan & Adamson, 2010). Hence, schools with English mediums began to gain standing. From this, the Chinese were able to witness the importance of English. It first started as a means of doing better business with the West. However, it developed into those with English having a "sense of superiority" over others (Boyle, 1997). Commercial benefits, together with social

prestige, have made the English language an exceptionally desirable commodity in Hong Kong. After the handover of 1997, the English language was still prevalent when it was expected to have less importance. With this, English became a part of the biliterate and trilingual language policy.

Until the 1980s, there was quite a competition for people to receive a university education in Hong Kong. According to Li (2022), university education opened up in the following decade and developed into something most people can attain. However, since the expansion of universities in Hong Kong, there has been a concern about the student's performances in English and Chinese. This encouraged the government to reform Hong Kong's language education, directing them to create a "biliterate and trilingual" language policy (Li, 2022), allowing their students to excel in speaking and understanding Cantonese, English, and Putonghua and reading and writing in English and Chinese.

2.2.   Immersion Programs

The immersion program is a method that schools utilize to promote a trilingual education. This program adopts a foreign or second language to teach a school's curriculum (Barimani, 2013). For a program to be regarded as an immersion, the language of instruction must be provided through the second language at least 50 percent of the time (Genesee, 1987). Through this program, children will be able to be immersed and learn in a language other than their mother tongue. This further supports the implementation of trilingual education in a school as it provides an opportunity for the child to learn another language.

The types of immersion programs can be categorized into various categories based on age and extent (Barimani, 2013). In the age component, there is early immersion for children aged

5-6, middle or delayed immersion for ages 9-10, and late immersion for ages 11-14. On the other hand, the extent component would include total, partial, and dual immersion, also known as double immersion. Total immersion (TI) is a program where the second language is used entirely to teach the curriculum (Barimani, 1987; Li, 2022). The MOI in the classroom would be the second language. Being fully immersed in another language will benefit the child as they can practice their listening and speaking skills in the foreign language. A program is considered partial immersion (PI) when half the class time is spent teaching the curriculum in a foreign or second language (Barimani, 1987). This program would support the student's language learning in their mother tongue as well as a second language. Moreover, if the student struggles to learn a second language, the teacher may utilize the mother tongue to clarify misunderstandings quickly. Double immersion (DI) is where the curriculum is taught in both the foreign language and the mother tongue. The allocation of language, however, does not matter as two patterns of language allocation are more prominent than others (Christian, 1996). The language allocation can be a 90/10 program where 90 percent is taught in the second language, and 10 percent is taught in English. The program can also be 50/50, where the language instruction is shared between the mother tongue and foreign language.

The acquisition of a second language with a functional proficiency is greatly influenced by when the DI program began. Studies have concluded that the earlier a double immersion program is implemented, the higher the proficiency children acquire in a non-native language (Genesee & Lambert, 1983; Li, 2022). This demonstrates how an early double immersion program would be most effective for trilingual education. In the case of Genesee and Lambert (1983), they conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of DI with English-speaking children receiving curriculum learning in 2 different second languages (Hebrew and French)

before learning the curriculum in their English mother tongue. From this study, they concluded that the DI program is able to strengthen a child's cognitive development. Due to a foreign language having a more "complex linguistic demand," the child is able to gain general language learning tactics (Genesee & Lambert, 1983). These tactics and skills can then be transferred to learning another language. This proves how the DI is quite effective in helping children learn a second language. In general, there are three types of immersion programs: total immersion, partial immersion, and double immersion programs, which are valuable systems to employ when executing a trilingual education.

2.3.   Trilingual Education in Early Childhood Education

In regard to trilingual education in early childhood education (ECE), hybrid pedagogical approaches such as child-centered pedagogies and traditional teacher-directed pedagogies are utilized to facilitate language learning (Tam, 2021; Leung et al., 2013; Lee, 2015). For instance, Tam (2021) studied the beliefs of different stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents) regarding trilingual education in Hong Kong. She used various data collection methods to understand stakeholders' beliefs on trilingual education in four not-for-profit making kindergartens in HK. She discovered inconsistencies between educators' and parents' beliefs on trilingual education. While educators focus more on the student's language learning and interest in language learning, parents are more interested in preparing their children academically. Furthermore, the principals are more disposed to integrating traditional and child-centered instructions, leading to hybrid pedagogies. Child-centered learning leads to more creativity, while teacher-directed learning helps with the memorization of vocabulary articulation and definitions (Tam, 2021). Therefore, teachers acknowledged that it is more advantageous for students to learn through games, songs, acting in accordance with role models, and practicing than learning through memorization and

listening to lectures. In addition, Lee (2015) conducted a case study on five kindergartens in HK, observing the practice of trilingual education in the early years of voucher and non-voucher kindergartens. She mentioned that the balance between teacher-directed and student-supported learning is crucial to helping students successfully learn three languages in their childhood.

Another instance of using child-centered pedagogies in trilingual education is from Leung et al. (2015). They examined ECE teachers' interpretation and actualization of the language policy. Out of the 700 sets of questionnaires sent out to various educators, they received 276 responses. Examining these educators' interpretation and actualization of the language policy, they noted that thematic projects and whole language approaches are practiced to increase students' interests. Like Tam (2021), implementing these approaches would comprise songs, games, role-play, and interactive activities to assist the students' language development. From this review, there is quite a few research regarding the hybrid pedagogies of teacher-directed and child-centered learning. Combining these two pedagogies helps aid the students' language learning in three different languages (Tam, 2021; Leung et al., 2013; Lee, 2015). Overall, this shows how hybrid pedagogies are essential in implementing trilingual education in HK kindergartens.

3. Research Design

3.1. Case Study Method

The approach used in this project was the qualitative research method of a case study. A case study is a method of research that requires in-depth research into a specific phenomenon (Zainal, 2007). This method uses detailed contextual analysis to examine information regarding the research topic. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex situations. In the case of my honors project, I analyzed the implementation of trilingual education in an international kindergarten in HK. The case study research method is a practical solution when there are difficulties in acquiring data from significant sample populations (Zainal, 2007). With limited time to complete this project, a smaller sample size would be more appropriate.

Tam (2021) and Lee (2015) used similar research methods to investigate the topic of trilingual education. Tam (2021) focused more on a qualitative case study approach, revealing the perspectives of diverse stakeholders and examining the challenges in implementing trilingual education and the implications. Lee (2015) used the case study method to explore the utilization of English, Putonghua, and Cantonese in classrooms of HK kindergartens. This study is related to the topics mentioned in these articles as they are all case studies on some aspects of the implementation of trilingual education in HK kindergarten. Combining the various elements of each article, this study decided to take a case study approach to investigate the implementation of trilingual education in an international kindergarten in HK.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study included one school director and two language teachers from an international kindergarten in HK. The criteria for the kindergarten were that they had to

teach three different languages at their kindergarten. The chosen international kindergarten teaches three different languages: French, English, and Mandarin. Of the two language teachers interviewed, one teaches French while the other teaches English. In total, 3 educators were interviewed from this international kindergarten.

3.3. Data Collection

This data collection procedure began in late January 2025 and lasted till mid-March. For the project to be conducted ethically, the participants were fully aware of the purpose of the research, the type of data to be collected, and how it will be stored (Dooly et al., 2017). The participants were able to withdraw from the project whenever they would like. One language teacher withdrew from the project due to her only having a year of teaching experience. One French and one English teacher participated in the interviewing process. Following the participation agreement, a consent form was sent to the kindergarten, and participants were interviewed for them to sign. The interviews with the school director and the two language teachers occurred from late February to mid-March. The interview questionnaire for school directors and language teachers is found in Appendix 1-2. Lastly, the participants will be presented with a summary of the results after the project has ended.

Since this project followed a qualitative research approach, the data collection includes interviews with educators and analysis of documents. I interview the director of the kindergarten and the French and English language teachers at this kindergarten. The interviews were recorded through ZOOM online and lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. In these interviews, I asked the educators their views on trilingual education and how their kindergarten implements it—inquiring more about their lesson plans, collaboration with their colleagues, teaching

methods, and pedagogies. Collecting this data allowed me to understand the role of educators and the teaching pedagogies used to execute trilingual education. Besides the interviews, documents such as the kindergarten booklet, school schedule, and French curriculum objectives were collected to analyze further how the kindergarten would put trilingual education into action. Lastly, I once visited the kindergarten to conduct class observations for the French, English, and Mandarin language classes. The class and school observation forms are found in Appendix 3-4. The overall sample size of the project is small due to the restricted time and resources accessible.

Qualitative data analysis of content analysis is the method of data analysis for this project. Graue (2015) states that qualitative data analysis is the "description, classification, and interconnection" procedure of a particular phenomenon with concepts. Content analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis. Through content analysis, there is an emphasis on identifying the meaning of texts into categories (Graue, 2015). The interviews collected were transcribed into text, allowing for better analysis. The text then was divided into units of meaning, which are reduced and labeled as codes. This will make it easier to label important things the interviewees have said and present the results in the paper (Graue, 2015). Then, considering the documents (kindergarten booklet, school schedule, French curriculum objectives, and class observation notes), the international kindergarten is analyzed. This happened using content analysis to divide the data from documents, interviews, and observations into a few categories. Reliability and validity refer to the consistency of the findings being similar to other researchers' findings in the field and the truthfulness of the research results (Franklin et al., 2001; Golafshani, 2003; Krirk & Miller, 1986). To ensure that my data were analyzed with reliability and validity, I connected my findings to the literature review to see if there were any similarities to previous research findings.

4. Findings

The data from this research is collected from school documents, interviews, and classroom observations to provide the opportunity to look into the workings of an international kindergarten in HK implementing trilingual education. Through the data collection, the following objectives are observed: the reasons for the case kindergarten to implement trilingual education, their curation of trilingual language learning, the adoption of early language learning, the structure of the language classes, the combination of curriculums, and the role of educators in terms of trilingual education. For the most part, the case international kindergarten has its unique way of designing its language classes. It combines the preferences of the parents and the Agency for French Education Abroad (AEFE) to provide an early immersion program for their students. Altogether, this affects how the kindergarten allocates language learning times, how they apply additional foreign curriculums, and how educators view trilingual education as a whole.

4.1. Reasons for Trilingual Education

The French government accredits international kindergartens and schools worldwide under the AEFE. This agency aims to support children of French families residing abroad and foreign pupils by promoting the French language and culture through 5 different learning domains (MEFA, 2025). According to the kindergarten director, he mentioned that the AEFE accredits their kindergarten. Moreover, the AEFE is pushing to develop trilingual education in AEFE schools around the world. This motivates the kindergarten to implement a trilingual program.

The director had seen the results of students who underwent trilingual education early on as "very interesting." The director observed that these students have ample ability to speak at

least three or more languages by the time they turn 7 or 8 years old. In addition, the director stated that numerous international families live around the kindergarten area, which prompts the kindergarten to propose teaching not only one or two languages but three languages in total. These international families are looking for kindergartens that can help foster multiple language learning for their kids. The exposure and stimulation to multiple languages in this kindergarten would be useful for a child with a diverse international background.

4.2.   Curation of a Trilingual Language Learning

The particularity of this international kindergarten is that the parents have the decision to curate their child's language learning. According to the kindergarten class schedule (see Table 1), from Monday to Friday, except for Wednesday, the day is separate to first language (L1) learning in the morning, with second (L2) and third (L3) language learning in the afternoon. The French and English languages are offered for L1, while French, English, and Mandarin are offered for L2 and L3.

The director introduced the curation of trilingual language learning into two main streams: (1) French stream and (2) International stream. If the parents decide to put their child into the French stream, the child will learn 50% of the time in French while the other 50% will be divided between English and Mandarin. This would indicate that the child will be learning French as L1. Regarding the L2 and L3, the parents can further decide whether they would like more time for English or Mandarin. Referring to the class schedule (see Table 1), L1 is allocated 150 minutes, while 90 minutes and 30 minutes are distributed to L2 and L3, respectively.

Table 1.

Class Schedule of Kindergarten

Class Schedule			First Language (L1)	Second Language (L2)	Third Language (L3)
Time & Duration	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
8:30-8:40 *(10 mins.)*	Free play time (**L1**)				
8:40-9:00 *(20 mins.)*	Grouping & activities (**L1**)				
9:00-9:30 *(30 mins.)*	2 of 4 rotating speaking workshops (**L1**)				
9:30-10:00	Recess – Snack and Toilet Time				
10:00-10:30 *(30 mins.)*	Motor Skills (**L1**)				
10:30-11:00 *(30 mins.)*	2 of 4 rotating speaking workshops (**L1**)				
11:00-11:30 *(30 mins.)*	Various learning in science, mathematics, & art (**L1**)				
11:30-13:30	Lunch Break				
1:30-14:00 *(30 mins.)*	**L3** – Initiation to another language, listening, discovering, culture, songs, & games		**L1** – Literature & types of writings. Various learning in graphic design, mathematics, & arts.	**L3** – Initiation to another language, listening, discovering, culture, songs, & games	
14:00-14:30 *(30 mins.)*	**L2** – Various learning in graphic design, mathematics, & arts.			**L2** – Various learning in graphic design, mathematics, & arts.	
14:30-15:00	Recess – Snack and Toilet Time			Recess – Snack and Toilet Time	**L2** – Various learning in graphic design, mathematics, & arts.
15:00-15:15 *(15 mins.)*	**L2** – Various learning in graphic design, mathematics, & arts.			**L2** – Various learning in graphic design, mathematics, & arts.	
15:15-16:00 *(45 mins.)*					
Total 26 hours/week	5 hours 30 minutes	5 hours 30 minutes	4 hours 45 minutes	5 hours 30 minutes	4 hours 45 minutes

On the other hand, if the parents choose to put their child into the international stream, English will be regarded as the L1. At the same time, French and Mandarin will be designated as L2 and L3, depending on the parent's preferences. Altogether, this curation of language learning provides students with the opportunity to experience all three languages.

4.3. Early Language Learning

Other than kindergarten classes for French, English, and Mandarin, there are playgroups for toddlers to attend in these three languages. The students would start by attending the case

kindergarten's playgroups at ages 13-30 months to be more fluent in these three languages. The French teacher stated that,

> "This year in my class, the non-native ones have been at [the kindergarten] for 2-3 years if they came for the playgroups. So they have a good understanding of the [French] language."

Following the early exposure to the French, English, and Mandarin languages in playgroups, the students have a smoother transition into kindergarten. From this, the students have little to no issues understanding the teacher's instructions and can communicate a little in the language of instruction of the class. The director expresses how, in the beginning, the students can already switch between French, English, and Mandarin languages, albeit not fluently, but to the point of understanding and a little communication. Moreover, another language teacher states that the students are able to switch languages to who they are talking to. For instance, I learned French with a French teacher, English with an English teacher, and attempted Mandarin with a Chinese teacher.

From the classroom observations, it can be seen that the class teachers would communicate instructions and teach the students in the MOI of the class. Moreover, the students in French and English classes will interact with the teachers in the same MOI. However, the students in the Chinese class will interact with the teachers in English and Mandarin. Since only a few students with a Chinese background or who have studied in kindergarten for more than a year, the rest of the students with less understanding of Mandarin will resort to communicating in English, a common language between the students and teachers. In general, the students at this

kindergarten show stronger comprehension of the languages the earlier they enter the kindergarten.

4.4. Cohesiveness between Structure of Language Classes

The classes at the case kindergarten are quite cohesive in terms of the proposed theme, the day-to-day structure, and the class size. Most classes at this kindergarten have around 15 students, allowing the teacher to be more attentive to students who require more support, especially the special needs students. The English teacher expressed that this attentiveness permits "each kid [to] find their niche" in learning since not "everybody has to achieve the same thing." As students develop at their own pace, teachers are able to assemble personalized activities for the benefit of their development.

The whole school follows one theme per month that the teachers and school director predetermines. By referring to the school schedule (see Table 1), it can be seen that the structure of the classes is the same for all language classes. In this structure, the teachers of the classes will create small group workshops based on the 5 domains of the French curriculum. For example, the French teacher claimed that,

> "I organize four or three different workshops, and I split my class into three groups. [...] You will have one workshop for language, one workshop for math, and one for graph [...], and they will move around the tables."

The English teacher also follows this structure of small group workshops but constructs the small groups into different levels.

"There's usually one activity that I know the kids will need assistance with, so that will be the main table, and then the other tables will be things they can kind of get on with themselves."

Overall, the structure of the daily schedule and themes are fixed throughout the classes. However, the teacher still gets to have autonomy within their own classroom. For instance, the English teacher describes their autonomy as,

"We are just kind of trusted to get on with our jobs. No micromanaging. We have meetings where we will discuss what is coming up or what we have done. [...] but in terms of once you're in class, how you manage your classroom, how you manage the children, how you implement the themes, that is totally up to us."

4.5. Combination of Curriculums

Due to the AEFE accreditation, all the language classes must follow the French curriculum's 5 domains of language usage, self-expression through physical activities, self-expression through artistic activities, developing the tools to structure thought (mathematics), and exploring the world (MENJS, 2015). Alongside the 5 domains from the French curriculum, the English classes additionally execute the EYFS curriculum, and the Chinese classes administer the local HK kindergarten curriculum. These three different curriculums can work harmoniously because the EYFS and HK kindergarten curricula have the same or similar learning areas as the French curriculum's.

Since the French curriculum is being emphasized at this kindergarten, the other curriculums have to adhere to the French curriculum. The school director highlights that the lesson contents must support the French curriculum, whether the class is in French, Mandarin, or

English. To accentuate the learning in different domains, the kindergarten strongly emphasizes art, where each month, the kindergarten will focus on learning about an artist and their art style. This allows the teachers to create activities following the different domains based on the artist's style. For instance, the French teacher can teach parts of the human body by creating a collage of the face. Through this, the teacher can introduce vocabulary based on the body parts, senses, clothes, etc. Moreover, for each learning domain to be met, the teachers would alternate days to teach the different domains. From this, the students can experience and develop these learning domains throughout the week.

4.6.   Role of Educators

Early childhood educators at this kindergarten play a vital role in implementing trilingual education. These educators ensure that the three languages–French, English, and Mandarin–will be integrated into the learning environment. The school director is responsible for managing the school's daily schedules, overseeing that the lessons meet the requirements of the AEFE, and fostering a collaborative atmosphere for teachers and students.

The class teachers further support the school's mission by prioritizing the student's happiness and emotional well-being. The French teacher states, "I'm here to create a safe, stimulating, and rich learning environment" for the students. On the other hand, the English teacher emphasizes the importance of permitting children the time to bond with each other and freely express themselves. The director's role in a trilingual environment is to ensure the program runs smoothly. At the same time, the class teachers provide a nurturing space where the students can succeed in their multilingual journey.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion

In this portion, the findings from the data collection are further examined, followed by a critique of the literature review. Additionally, the limitations of the study and recommendations are to be made. The study's main purpose is to examine how an international kindergarten in HK implements trilingual education.

At this kindergarten, it was found that they provide parents the freedom to curate their child's trilingual learning experience, hand-picking which languages they want their child to learn as the first, second, and third languages. Depending on these families' cultural backgrounds and values, the parents will choose the languages accordingly. For instance, most families at this kindergarten are French, making them opt for the French stream, which has more emphasis on the French language. In the French stream, students are to learn 50 percent of French and 50 percent divided between English and Mandarin.

Barimani (2013) implied that immersion programs commonly begin when a child is 5 to 6 years old. However, in the case of this kindergarten, the children are explicitly immersed in one language as early as 13 months in their playgroups. Early exposure to multilingual languages would assist the children in enhancing their understanding of various languages and cultures, bringing about global awareness. From the findings, the director and class teachers have reported that their students are able to alternate between languages based on who their conversation partner is. For this reason, the students have shown a higher proficiency level in their mother tongue, a second language, and a third language. Similar to this study, researchers have proposed that executing an early DI program would lead to advanced proficiency in a non-native language

(Genesee & Lambert, 1983; Li, 2022). On the other hand, literature has found that children studying DI programs improved their cognitive development (Genesee & Lambert, 1983). As mentioned before, students at this kindergarten can switch languages according to the person they are talking to. This specific skill requires more advanced cognitive development, especially at this age, to identify which language to speak to which person. In general, this proves how student's cognitive abilities are reinforced in a DI program. From these points, it can be concluded that trilingual education enhances a child's language skills as well as promotes their cognitive development in order to equip them for the multicultural world.

The research results have revealed that kindergarten students are being taught in three different languages. It has similarities to a DI program; however, it does not qualify as DI since the school curriculum is taught in languages other than one foreign language and a mother tongue. Therefore, it can be inferred that the kindergarten is adopting an early multilingual immersion program. Instead of a 90/10 or 50/50 allocation of language from DI (Christian, 1996), the kindergarten takes a 50/30/20 approach to allocate their language learning, where 50% is allocated to the first language, 30% to the second language, and 20% to third language. It is clear that this kindergarten created its own unique way of language allocation to suit the parent's needs regarding their child's language learning.

This kindergarten prioritizes the implementation of French and English in their French and international streams, primarily because these are the first languages they offer. Due to this, Mandarin is only being taught as a second or third language, which can be a disadvantage for their students to excel in this language at the same level as students in the first language classes. Despite this challenge, many students can still exhibit a strong comprehension of Mandarin in both speaking and listening contexts. This emphasizes how the kindergarten is able to educate

their students with a language, even though it is not their primary language focus, showing their strength in creating a multilingual environment.

Unlike most international kindergartens, which adopt only a primary curriculum throughout the kindergarten, this kindergarten is distinct by adopting three different curricula for each language. From the findings, it can be evident that the kindergarten is accredited by the AEFE, which is the French curriculum. Nevertheless, the EYFS curriculum is utilized in the English class, and the HK kindergarten curriculum is used in the Mandarin class. Since the AEFE accredits the kindergarten, they need to reach all the requirements of the French curriculum. Thus, implementing the French curriculum is more important than the EYFS and HK kindergarten curriculum. The teachers in the English and Mandarin classes can follow their own curriculums but ultimately must adhere to the French curriculum to meet the AEFE criteria. These three curriculums can work well together in this kindergarten because the EYFS and HK kindergarten curricula contain a similar structure of learning areas as the French curriculum's 5 domains. This particular way of implementing three different curriculums allows each language class to excel in its own way since each curriculum is catered to support those individual languages. Moreover, it can be seen that these curriculums that are created in different countries generally all follow the same kinds of learning areas to help develop their student's learning.

From the results, the teachers at this kindergarten generally follow a structured curriculum and schedule where teachers would apply small group workshops to teach. Through this, the teachers are able to teach more of the curriculum's learning areas, as each small workshop will be dedicated to one learning area. On top of that, the director will decide the theme of the month that teachers would have to adhere to when teaching their lessons. In spite of that, each teacher has autonomy in their own classroom in regard to the content and how they

conduct their lessons. This freedom allows the teachers to structure their lessons and activities to cater towards their student's particular needs.

5.2. Limitations of Study

A significant limitation of this study would be the Chinese teacher pulling out from the interview. Although much information has already been collected from French and English teachers, it would be advantageous to know the Chinese teachers' perspectives on implementing trilingual education. Looking into the teaching approaches and cultural influences the Chinese teacher would bring to a classroom, differing from the French and English classes. Having a perspective from each of the languages of this kindergarten would help understand the impact of trilingual education on the student's learning and the various teaching pedagogies used to accomplish that. Moreover, it would provide a more comprehensive opinion on the complications and achievements early childhood educators would experience in a multilingual environment.

Another limitation would be the investigation of the methodologies and pedagogies that teachers use to implement trilingual education. From the findings, there is not much said in the interviews, observations, and documentation on teachers' teaching approaches. It would be recommended to investigate deeper the methodologies teachers use to apply trilingual education. Furthermore, comparing the differences between the pedagogies each language teacher uses would help see each educator's perspective on trilingual education.

5.3. Recommendations

This case study only focuses on a single international kindergarten in HK. While this allows for significant insight into the practices and curriculums the kindergarten utilizes, there is

a need for more extensive research. Therefore, future research can be conducted on multiple international kindergartens in HK, which would allow for more generalized findings. In addition, to expand further on the understanding of trilingual education in early childhood education in HK, research can be performed to compare the way international and local kindergartens in HK implement trilingual education. This research can explore and discover the various educational philosophies and cultural influences on language acquisition in these kindergartens.

5.4.   Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the study and implications for future research, this study is able to provide evidence on the process of implementing trilingual education at this kindergarten. The kindergarten is able to establish a system that allows the parents to curate their child's language learning. This freedom of choice is a characteristic this kindergarten has when adopting a trilingual education. Furthermore, the kindergarten applies an early multilingual immersion program where there is time allocated for the French, English, and Mandarin languages. This allocation of language would be separated into 50/30/20, where 50% is for the first language, 30% for the second language, and 30% for the third language. Lastly, the French, EYFS, and HK kindergarten curriculum fusion can be seen at this kindergarten. For each language learning to be conducted to their standard, the kindergarten allows their teachers to follow the curriculum suited for their language learning. Moreover, the teachers are given the autonomy to conduct their classes in their own ways in regard to the curriculum. These curriculums are able to work well because they have similar learning areas or domains that they seemingly blend together. In general, this kindergarten utilizes these particular methods in implementing their trilingual education, which works in favor of their students' language development.

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7. Appendix

7.1. Appendix 1: Director Interview Questionnaire

Interview Time:

Date:

Director:

Kindergarten:

Thank you for taking the time to be a part of my research study. The purpose of this research is to understand how trilingual education is being implemented in Hong Kong. This study focuses on comparing the local and international kindergarten's ways of implementation of trilingual education in Hong Kong. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate the views of educators (principal/director and language teachers) on trilingual education and the methods and pedagogies used to implement it. This interview will be audio recorded, and all information collected will be used for research purposes only. This interview will be conducted in English and will take around 60 minutes to complete. If you are unclear about any questions, please feel free to tell me. The data collected will be stored securely and will be destroyed 2 months after the research project is completed. All information will be collected anonymously and referred to as such in the report. Now, I will turn on the audio recorder.

1. Can you please introduce yourself?
   a. How long have you been a kindergarten principal/director in general and in this kindergarten?
2. Can you tell me about your kindergarten?
   a. What is the vision and mission?
3. What curriculum(s) does your school follow?
   a. Can you describe this curriculum(s)?
   b. Is it related to the mission and vision of your school?
   c. How does your school implement this curriculum(s)?
4. Why did your school choose to implement trilingual education?
5. What does implementing trilingual education look like at your school?

      a.   What's the medium of instruction(s) in your school?

      b.   What is the language allocation in your school? Is the language instruction shared between the languages?

      c.   What is the time allocated to the different language classes in your school?

6. Is the implementation of trilingual education based on any particular language teaching theories?

7. How do you supervise the language teachers? Please give some examples.

8. Does your school provide professional development for your language teachers? If yes, can you give some examples of professional development?

9. In relation to implementing trilingual education, what do you think of your role as a principal/director?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will be kept confidential. If you need to contact me, this is my email address and phone number.

7.2.   Appendix 2: Language Teacher Interview Questionnaire

Interview Time:

Date:

Language Teacher:

Kindergarten:

Thank you for taking the time to be a part of my research study. The purpose of this research is to understand how trilingual education is being implemented in Hong Kong. This study focuses on comparing the local and international kindergarten's ways of implementation of trilingual education in Hong Kong. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate the views of educators (principal/director and language teachers) on trilingual education and the methods and pedagogies used to implement it. This interview will be audio recorded, and all information collected will be used for research purposes only. This interview will be conducted in English and will take around 60 minutes to complete. If you are unclear about any questions, please feel free to tell me. The data collected will be stored securely and will be destroyed 2 months after the research project is completed. All information will be collected anonymously and referred to as such in the report. Now, I will turn on the audio recorder.

1. Can you please introduce yourself?
    a. What age level do you teach?
    b. What language(s) do you teach?
2. What curriculum does your school follow?
    a. Can you describe this curriculum?
3. How does your school implement this curriculum?
4. What does implementing trilingual education look like at your school?
    a. Can you give some examples of implementation?
    b. Is the language curriculum based on any particular language teaching theories?
5. How would you plan lessons for your language classes?
    a. Are there any methods or pedagogies used to plan your language lesson? Please specify.
    b. Can you give a run-down example of your lesson plans?

      c.   Would you collaborate with other language teachers when planning your lesson plans? If yes, how do you collaborate with other language teachers when planning for your lessons?

6.   How do you conduct your language classes?

      a.   What is the medium of instruction in your classroom? Do you use any other mediums of instructions?

      b.   Are there any methods or pedagogies that you use to teach that language? Please specify.

      c.   What activities do you use in class to teach that language?

      d.   What tools or materials do you use to conduct your language lesson?

      e.   Do you have any difficulties teaching the language?

7.   Do you collaborate with other language teachers?

      a.   If yes, can you describe the collaboration process?

      b.   Do you think collaboration is effective in implementing trilingual education?

      c.   Does your school have professional development for language teachers?

8.   What is your ideal way of teaching language lessons?

9.   Concerning trilingual education, what do you think is your role in language teaching?

10. How do you cater to the different needs of your students?

11. What do you think about the performance of your students in class?

      Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will be kept confidential and if you need to contact me, this is my email address and phone number.

7.2.   Appendix 3: Classroom Observation Sheet

Background
1. **Class background**
   - **School**:
   - **Date**:
   - **Observation time**:
   - **Total number of students**:
   - **Age range**:

2. **Language class:** French/English/Chinese

3. **Language profile of the students in the class**
   - **Number of students who are ethnic French:**
   - **Number of students who are ethnic Chinese:**
   - **Number of students who are other ethnics:**

4. **Language profile of the teacher**
   a. **Gender**: Male/Female
   b. **Ethnic background**:
   c. **Teaching experience**:
   d. **Linguistic Background:**

Language	Fluent	Intermediate	Limited	Not Known
French				
English				
Mandarin				
Cantonese				
Other				

Activities
5. **Activities in the classroom:**

6. **How do the students respond to these activities?**

Languages in the classroom

7. **Language(s) the teacher uses to instruct the classroom:**
    a. **In the French/English/Mandarin classroom, the teacher explains French/English/Mandarin vocabularies, phonics, etc. in:**
        ☐ All or majority in French
        ☐ All or majority in Mandarin
        ☐ All or majority in English
        ☐ Mixed languages (English/French/Mandarin)
        ☐ Notes:
    b. **In the French/English/Mandarin classroom, the teacher interacts with the students in:**
        ☐ All or majority in French
        ☐ All or majority in Mandarin
        ☐ All or majority in English
        ☐ Mixed languages (English/French/Mandarin)
        ☐ Notes:
    c. **In the French/English/Mandarin classroom, the teacher gives instructions/explanations in:**
        ☐ All or majority in French
        ☐ All or majority in Mandarin
        ☐ All or majority in English
        ☐ Mixed languages (English/French/Mandarin)
        ☐ Notes:

8. **Language(s) of students**
    a. **In the French/English/Mandarin classroom, the student interacts with the teacher in:**
        ☐ All or majority in French
        ☐ All or majority in Mandarin
        ☐ All or majority in English
        ☐ Mixed languages (English/French/Mandarin)
        ☐ Notes:
    b. **In the French/English/Mandarin classroom, the students interact with other students in:**
        ☐ All or majority in French

☐ All or majority in Mandarin
☐ All or majority in English
☐ Mixed languages (English/French/Mandarin)
☐ Notes:

9. **Effectiveness of lesson**

Aspects	Points
Objectives	
Organization	
Methods/teaching approaches	
Delivery & pace of lesson	
Content of lesson	
Students participation	
Teacher's competence in the target language	

7.2. **Appendix 4: School Environment Observation Sheet**

1. **School background:**
   - **School:**
   - **Date:**

2. **Language(s) used in school media:**

Media	In French	In English	In Mandarin
Posters			
School notices			
School pamphlets			
School broadcasts			
Others: _____			

3. **Language(s) mostly used in conversations between teachers:**
   - ☐ In French
   - ☐ In English
   - ☐ In Mandarin
   - ☐ In Cantonese
   - ☐ Notes:

4. **Language(s) students predominantly use in the playground:**
   - ☐ In French
   - ☐ In English
   - ☐ In Mandarin
   - ☐ In Cantonese
   - ☐ Notes:

5. **Language(s) school staff (cleaners, receptionist, etc.) predominantly use:**
   - ☐ In French
   - ☐ In English
   - ☐ In Mandarin
   - ☐ In Cantonese
   - ☐ Notes: