

Oral Language Development in the Philippine Kindergarten Curriculum: Revisiting the Competencies, Identifying Strengths and Gaps and Drafting Recommendations

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Abstract. The significant role of oral language (OL) in the early years and its impact on other developmental domains is well-documented. Since a high percentage of Filipino learners are not exhibiting literacy skills at their level, it is within this context that this research examined how OL development is expressed in the national kindergarten curriculum guide (KCG). We specifically sought to determine: the OL components evident in three early language and literacy reference documents and the OL components highlighted in the KCG. Curriculum mapping was undertaken in this research. The findings indicate that the reference documents generally reflected all the linguistic components at varying proportions with semantics as highly present. The 73 KCG competencies tapped all the language components with pragmatics and semantics as highly evident. More than half of the competencies were classified under two or more language components which provides evidence for the interrelatedness of these components. Almost half of the KCG competencies were classified under expressive language while 21% were identified as receptive skills. The informative function of language was highly evident at 72.6% while other functions were present at 12.33% and below. Gaps, strengths, and recommendations for the KCG were presented in this paper.

Keywords: kindergarten curriculum, early childhood curriculum, oral language components, kindergarten oral language development

Introduction

Language is a complex system that involves utilizing receptive and expressive skills as well as reflective processes that occur in a communicative context (Hulme et al., 2020). Students being able to participate in the communication process within an educational environment is necessary for optimizing learning opportunities. Variability in children's early language experiences tends to result in inequities (Walker & Carta, 2020) and unexpected differences in the development of oral language abilities put learners at a disadvantage that may consequently affect literacy learning and overall academic performance (Dictaldo et al., 2020).

The Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Target 4.2, is a universal call for access to quality early childhood development and readiness for primary education (Global Campaign for Education, n.d.). This encourages the provision of quality early childhood opportunities for all learners. International assessment reports and research in the country affirm that a high percentage of Filipino learners are not exhibiting literacy skills at their level. A review of literature on developing countries corroborated international trends that children entering preschools with smaller vocabularies will experience more challenges unless provided with targeted support (Nag et al., 2019). Data from the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) in 2019 revealed that the reading proficiency level of most Grade 5 students in the Philippines is equivalent to that in the first years of primary school.

Developmental models (Chall 1983, as cited in Hermosa, 2002; Fries, 1963, as cited in Hermosa, 2002) emphasize the relationship of oral language to literacy and their support for strong reading skills at the early stages. Oral language is recognized as an area that must receive particular attention alongside vocabulary development. According to the simple view of reading (SVR), the ability to understand oral language is an important component that allows for comprehending the written word.

Reading is the product of both decoding and linguistic comprehension. Linguistic comprehension encompasses a broad range of oral language skills which include and are not limited to vocabulary, oral reasoning, and the interpretation of discourse to name a few (Lonigan et al., 2018). The crucial role and impact of oral language in the different domains of learning have been documented in a substantial amount of research.

Oral language is an important skill that needs to be developed in children, especially in the early years. In a study by van der Pluijm et al. (2019), they reiterated the importance of giving attention to oral language development since it is a key factor in the literacy development of young children (Sénéchal & Lefevre, 2002; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Verhoeven & VanLeeuwe, 2008). It is here where young children gain vocabulary knowledge and syntactic structure that are primarily drawn from their oral language used at home that would later be used in reading, writing, and other literacy skills (Shanahan, 2006).

In the National Kindergarten Curriculum Framework (NKCF) which supports Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education, children are first taught using what is considered to be their first language. In their first year of school, it is hoped that young learners will develop positive attitudes towards reading, writing, and being effective users and learners of language (Education Development Center Inc., 2018). In the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (KCG), oral language is given emphasis within the domain of Language, Literacy, and Communication (Department of Education, 2016). Oral Language as a subdomain includes twelve competencies that emphasize expressive language tasks that children need to display at the end of the year. But Bernardo (2007) cautions educators that care must be taken such that curricula for developing language are not merely a way to standardize 'linguistic behavior of pupils' through prescriptive teaching. Developing language must go beyond understanding a pre-given coding system and be recognized as a complex sociocultural process situated in a particular context. An added challenge however is creating and delivering lessons that incorporate and address the competencies articulated (Moneva, 2016). Students will not get the language and literacy instruction they need if there is a lack of cohesion in curriculum design, lesson planning, and the delivery of literacy instruction. It is important therefore to ensure that the oral language competencies are well-articulated in the KCG which serves as the basis for instruction. Thus, this paper is generally framed to examine how the development of oral language is explicitly captured in the KCG. No known research specifically evaluated the KCG from this lens. With these in mind, the specific questions that drive this research are:

1. What are the oral language components evident in the early language and literacy reference documents that are relevant for examining the Kinder Curriculum Guide (KCG)?
2. Which oral language components are highlighted in the KCG?
3. What are the strengths and gaps in the KCG?

Related Literature

Nature of oral language

Communication through the receptive and expressive modes entails an understanding and facility of use of crucial interdependent skills (Cregan, n.d.). Receptive language pertains to the ability to *interpret and understand linguistic and nonlinguistic representations*. Processing the input information appropriately will lead to successful communication. Difficulties with receptive language may have effects on attention, behavior, social skills, literacy, sensory and auditory processing, expressive language, or executive functioning. On the other hand, expressive language refers to the ability to express one's needs, thoughts, and feelings through verbal or nonverbal communication in a way that makes sense. Children with difficulties in producing language may also struggle with any of the following: asking questions, naming objects, giving comments, vocabulary, morphology, syntax, or semantics, among others (Vollmer, 2020).

As children grow, they gain an awareness and knowledge of the components of oral language. Honig (2007) has identified five domains of language, namely: phonology, grammar, morphology, vocabulary, and pragmatics. Phonology pertains to the rules of speech sounds within a language. The development of phonological awareness takes place once the acquisition of the basic phonological system for speaking and listening is evident (Brooke, 2018). Other aspects of phonological awareness include the awareness of words in sentences or syllables in words, rhymes, alliterations, and phonemes. Grammar or syntax refers to the rules of sentence structure in a specific language. Awareness of this system of rules allows children to understand and express themselves in comprehensible units of speech. Morphology is the study of words in their internal organization, with a focus on the smallest units of meaning in words as well as structural analysis. This is considered an important basis for vocabulary development. Vocabulary or semantics is another component of oral language, which pertains to making sense of the meaning of

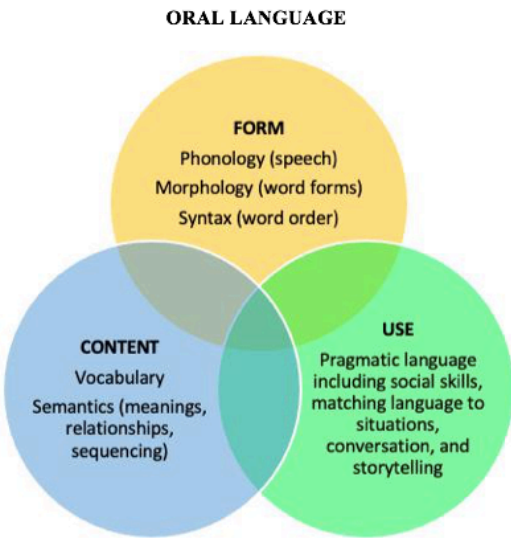
words in a language. This covers expressive and receptive vocabulary and is not merely measured by the breadth of vocabulary knowledge. The depth of vocabulary knowledge is assessed by focusing on other aspects such as relationships between words (antonyms, synonyms, etc.) idioms, multiple shades of meaning, and non-literal expressions. Pragmatics, as a component of language, highlights the awareness of the social rules of language. Brooke extended the domains emphasized by Honig and added discourse as a sixth linguistic component (Brooke, 2018). Discourse focuses on oral and written forms of formal and informal communication such as conversations and discussions.

Cregan (n.d.) highlights extralinguistic knowledge as an additional important aspect of effective linguistic communication. These include paralinguistic features or prosody - intonation, pitch, emphasis/stress, pace, pause, and volume. These help convey and clarify meaning. In addition, nonlinguistic cues e.g. use of gestures, eye contact, facial expression, body language, and physical proximity when used in communication exchanges facilitate the delivery and clarity of the message.

In contrast to the language components discussed by Honig (2007), Brooke (2018), Cregan (n.d.), and Cohen (2010) took a different approach by identifying two language domains: structural language and pragmatic communication. Structural language skills comprise auditory verbal information processing, phonology, vocabulary (semantics), grammar (syntax and morphosyntax), and narrative discourse while pragmatic language skills refer to the use of gestures, appropriate language, and conversational turn-taking in social interactions, among others. He viewed most of the language components as under the umbrella of structural language skills except for pragmatics, which is a domain on its own with the inclusion of non-linguistic cues.

Oral language is a complex system and the linguistic components, as identified in this discussion, interact with each other in diverse ways. They work together toward a meaningful exchange of ideas. It is evident that the various components of language are simultaneously tapped in any episode of expressive or receptive language. While oral language pertains to receptive and expressive skills, it can also be viewed as involving form, use, and content (Bloom & Lahey, 1978) as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Bloom & Lahey's (1978) Receptive and Expressive Language Components



A child with a desire to play outside would use simple social (pragmatics) rules of the language as well as appropriate vocabulary (vocabulary, semantics) to convey this need (content) in a form (phonology, morphology, syntax), that is comprehensible to the listener. From this lens, the components of oral language are not occurring in isolation. Instead, these are intertwined as the use of oral language carries content that is embedded in a particular form. Effective integration of form, use, and content may be visualized as the overlap of the three circles in the middle, with successful understanding and use of language as the outcome (Bloom & Lahey, 1978).

On the other hand, Halliday (in Thwaite, 2019) puts across that language is learned in a variety of ways from the context of the social interactions of the child. He identifies seven functions of language that are evident in different phases as the child develops, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Halliday's Functions of Language

Language Function	Focus
Instrumental	To express a need and manage one's self
Regulatory	To regulate or control other people's behavior
Interactional	To communicate and interact with people around
Personal	To express awareness about one's self e.g. emotions
Heuristic	To learn about reality and to solve problems
Imaginative	To create a world of their own
Informative	To provide a piece of new knowledge or facts

The role of oral language and its impact on learners have been well-documented. It promotes school readiness (Dionne et al., 2013) and socio-emotional development (Cohen, 2010). Oral language is the medium by which young learners express their needs and thoughts, initiate friendships, and interact with others. Expanding vocabulary, increasing awareness, and use of sentence structures for use in social conversation contribute to receptive and expressive language development. Language is meaning-based and this is what drives its communicative aspect. A message is created for a specific purpose and may occur within a social context. Oral language is also a predictor of later literacy performance (Komesidou & Hogan, 2020).

How language develops

Language acquisition is a feature unique to human development, that with very little effort, children are able to gain linguistic knowledge within a short period of time. Two central elements are said to make this possible: (1) biologically based predisposition to pick up a language, and (2) language encounters in the environment (Fernandez & Cairns, in Salim & Mehawesh 2014). According to Chomsky (in Hutaurok 2015), in language acquisition, the growth and maturation of the child in certain environmental matters.

Language typically develops according to a more or less universal sequence, with comprehension preceding production (Hulme et al. 2020). From the first months of life, the infant's language environment guides the development of native speech-perception and speech-production skills. Speech production begins with the early vocalizations stage, going through the holophrastic stage (single word stage), two-word stage, and the telegraphic stage respectively. Similarly, in the early months, the infant is learning about the relationships between spoken word forms and the objects and concepts in the world around them. (Hulme et al, 2020). Fenson et. al. and Lorraine (in Rosselli et al., 2014) discussed children's vocabulary development stating that by 3 years old, a child would have recognized around 1000 words, which will be twice as much by the time the child reaches 5 years of age, and at around 6 years old, the number of words reaches an average of about 2,600 words. According to Bolinger (in Hutaurok, 2015), the multiword stage shows the fastest increase with many more new additions everyday. Tomasello (in Rosselli et al., 2014) mentioned that the learning of morphosyntactic rules can be recognized in simple sentences of children between 2-5 years old, as well as the beginning of the construction of more sentences that are continuously getting more complex, concluding that at this age range, the development of grammar is very quick.

The context of language use

As children acquire their home language informally, once they enter school, they are confronted by demands to think, act, and talk in unfamiliar ways,' (DeStefano & Rentel, 1975, p.328) There are a variety of modes of discourse that they have yet to be familiar with and apply to daily language use whether in a conversational or more academic context. Early childhood language development is often focused on the conversational use of language which enriches their use of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). These expectations change when primary students transition to the higher grades where they use more technical language in the various content areas, which requires cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) wherein they engage in oral and written discourse across their academic subjects.

But in studying early language development, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of learners and the learning context that they are immersed in. Johnson and White (2020) note the re-emergence of developmental sociolinguistics which emphasizes that the development of language is highly dependent on the social matrix that the child is in (DeStefano, 1971). It acknowledges that language development is influenced by linguistic, social, and cultural factors and the identities involved in the communication process.

Similarly, the cultural microsystem model, a revision of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, argues that culture has to be situated in the context of the microsystem, instead of the macrosystem (Velez-Agosto, et. al., 2017). Empirical studies suggest that it is within the child's microsystem where culture is observed as part of daily routines and practices in the home, school as well as in other settings. Culture consists of the practices of social communities and the "interpretation of these practices through language" (Velez-Agosto, et. al., 2017, p. 906). Language is viewed not merely as a medium of communication, rather through language "practices are defined in content and form facilitating action that is not completely limited by those definitions because of context" (Velez-Agosto, et. al., 2017, p. 906). Language and practices act as tools and signs that are crucial parts of the child's microsystem.

Oral language and the kindergarten curriculum

There is literature that describes milestones for kindergarten; some of which show a strong focus on literacy while others cover all domains of development. A meta-analysis by National Research Council (1998) entitled Preventing Reading Difficulties (PRD) provides a list of oral language and emergent literacy developmental accomplishments of young children from birth to Grade 3 that successful learners are likely to exhibit. There are 29 accomplishments outlined for kindergarten.

Similarly, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) released a joint position paper that presents developmentally appropriate practices in learning reading and writing. It discusses a continuum of early literacy development from preschool through the primary years (National Association for the Education of Young Children, & International Reading Association, 1998). It highlights what children can do at particular phases and includes what teachers and parents can do at each phase to support literacy development. The preschool phase is named as awareness and exploration, and this becomes the foundation for literacy learning. On the other hand, kindergarten is termed as the experimental reading and writing phase and the identified goal is to develop basic concepts of print and start to engage and explore beginning reading and writing. There are 16 presented skills of children in these two phases which are illustrative rather than exhaustive in nature.

On the other hand, The Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist is a normed developmental screening tool that is used by various stakeholders who work with Filipino children (Department of Education, 2016a). Child Record 2 of this document is used as a formative assessment tool at the start and end of kindergarten in public schools. It outlines developmental milestones categorized under seven domains, namely: gross motor, fine motor, self-help, receptive language, expressive language, cognitive, and emotional. For the purposes of this research, the focus is on the 33 competencies under the three domains of receptive language, expressive language, and cognitive area.

The K to 12 kindergarten curriculum guide (KCG) hinges on the principles of the National Early Learning Framework (NELF) that underscore holistic learning and acknowledges that "every aspect of growth and development is interrelated and interdependent" (Department of Education, 2016b). Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) is considered as one of the theoretical bases of the KCG. It highlights that commonality, individuality, and context are key points to be addressed in work with young children. DAP upholds that children learn in an integrated manner which may be represented in an interdisciplinary approach (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). All domains of child development are significant with each one supporting and being supported by the others (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

The KCG prescribes the content and performance standards for five-year old children as outlined in the seven developmental domains, namely, socio-emotional development, values development, physical health & motor development, aesthetic/ creative development, mathematics, understanding of the physical & natural environment, and language, literacy and communication (Department of Education, 2016b). Domains are described to be strategically integrated to reflect their interrelatedness which are designed to contribute to the successful transition of a student from kindergarten to first grade.

These domains are further contextualized into five curricular themes: Myself, My Family, My School, My Community, and More Things Around Me. Moreover, the KCG details the specific competencies of each domain and activities which serve as guides for instructional planning and implementation (Department of Education, 2016b).

Figure 2
Curricular Themes in the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide

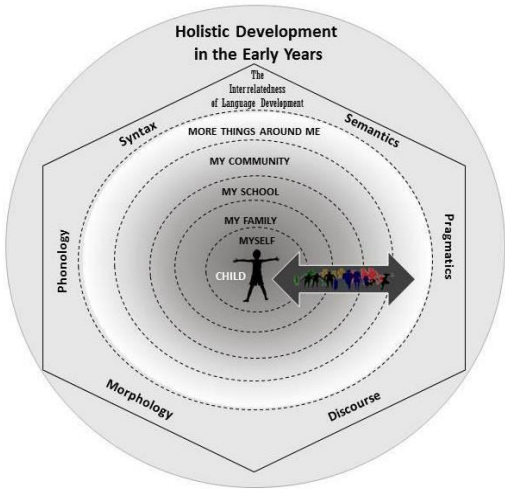


While interconnectedness among the seven domains is a feature of the KCG, oral language development is most evident in the domain area of Language, Literacy, and Communication and this is grouped with five other domains: auditory perception and discrimination (APD), phonological awareness (PA), alphabet knowledge (AK), vocabulary development (V), and listening comprehension (LC). Addressing these domains allows learners to express themselves using their mother tongue, which paves the way for early literacy learning, and the development of communicative skills. This will help improve students' attitudes toward reading and writing, as well as their perceptions of themselves as effective language users and learners (Department of Education, 2016b).

In curriculum design and implementation, it is of utmost significance that these competencies are clearly articulated so that instruction can be designed and delivered well. The competencies should be clear enough to be analyzed and broken down into the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes which can be phrased as more specific objectives. Clarity in identifying the essential prerequisites and outcomes can aid teachers plan for effective instruction (Gagne et al., 1992). In a research by Basa Pilipinas (Education Development Center Inc. 2018) aimed at determining the status of literacy instruction at the kindergarten level, three observers visited 32 schools from regions 1 and 7. During their observation, it was found that explicit instruction of letter knowledge was the sub-skill that was given the most priority. Other subdomains such as phonological awareness, book and print knowledge, listening comprehension, and writing were sidelined. Composing activities were rare, and writing was restricted to copying letters. A major indicator that oral language instruction was limited and not given enough focus was that teacher talk dominated classrooms leaving students little opportunity to express themselves beyond one-word responses (Education Development Center Inc. 2018). It is therefore necessary to review the oral language components in the KCG to determine if there are any components that may be lost in the unpacking process.

In light of the foregoing discussion, Figure 3 summarizes the theoretical basis for developing oral language in the early years curriculum.

Figure 3
Theoretical Bases for Developing Oral Language in the Early Years



In this framework, a young child is situated within a sociocultural context that allows interaction across all systems, from the microsystem to the macrosystem. As indicated by the broken circular lines, the movement of a child within a community is fluid, with actors moving in and out of these systems thereby capturing the diversity of communicative interactions, which is not limited to the microsystem. These interactions are supported by the various aspects that govern language development and learning. As shown in Figure 3, these six components of language are within a shared space to show the distinctions of each subcomponent but also to emphasize the intersections and interrelatedness of these components as it occurs in a communicative context.

Methodology

Many steps were undertaken to determine the language components evident in the national kindergarten curriculum guide as captured through the mapping of competencies related to oral language development. Since the development of language and literacy skills has been strongly associated with school success, a literature review focused on identifying early language and literacy documents that articulate the oral language competencies of five-year-old children. Two foreign references and one local resource were reviewed in-depth for this purpose. These include the following documents shown in Table 2. Oral language was represented by the following linguistic components: *phonology*, *syntax*, *morphology*, *semantics*, *pragmatics*, and *discourse* (Honig, 2007; Brooke, 2018).

Table 2
Early Childhood Early Literacy and Language Reference Documents

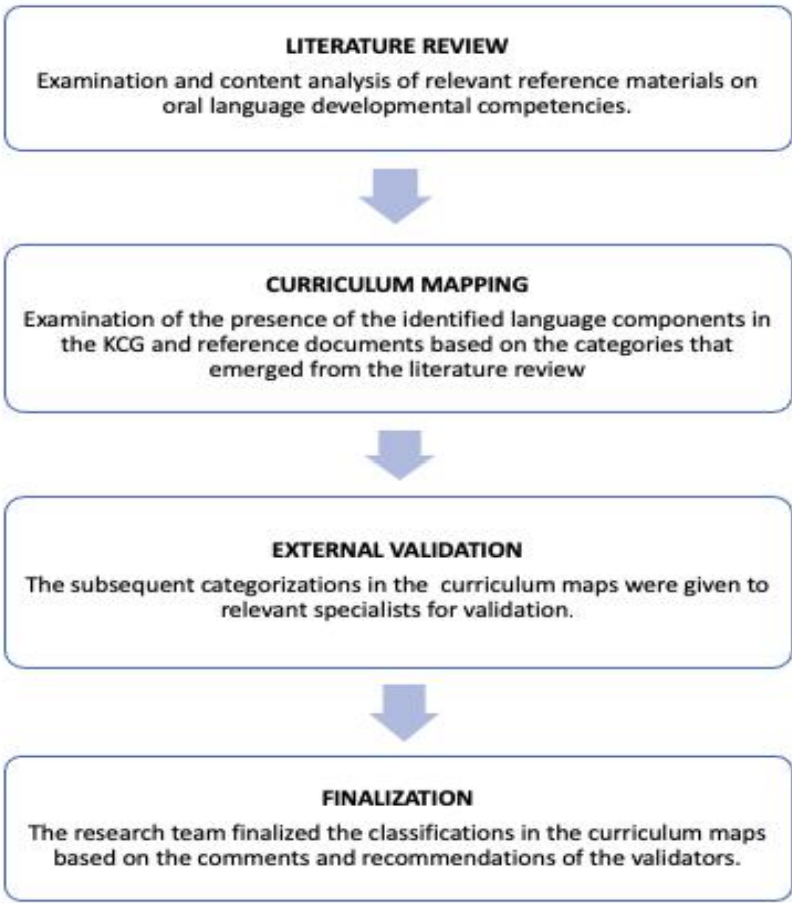
Document Name	Abbreviation	Description
1. Preventing Reading Difficulties	PRD	29 oral language and emergent literacy accomplishments were selected from a list of oral language developmental goals from birth to Grade 3
2. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) joint position paper	NAEYC/ IRA	16 skills were selected from this joint position paper which outlines developmentally appropriate reading and writing skills in early literacy development from preschool through the primary years
3. Early Child Care and Development Checklist	ECCD Checklist	33 competencies under the domains of receptive language, expressive language, and cognitive area from Child Record 2 were selected from this standardized developmental screening instrument that outlines developmental milestones

The individual competencies in each reference document underwent content analysis to help determine the language components that each given skill best represents. After having undergone external validation by a language expert, the language components that emerged were then used as a basis for mapping out the oral language competencies in the national kindergarten curriculum guide (KCG). Each skill was categorized, and the results were externally validated by experts in the fields of language education, early education, and kindergarten instruction. The following curriculum maps yielded from the process are as follows:

- A. Early language and Literacy Reference Documents according to language components
- B. KCG according to language components
- C. KCG according to expressive and receptive language modes
- D. KCG according to functions of language

Curriculum maps were then finalized based on the comments and recommendations of the validators. The results from the curriculum maps were further analyzed to identify the strengths, gaps, and recommendations for the KCG in line with the development of oral language skills. Figure 4 summarizes the steps undertaken.

Figure 4
Data Gathering Procedure



Results

This section presents the results of the mapping of the kindergarten competencies at three levels. It starts with a presentation of the findings in line with the oral linguistic components evident in the three early language and literacy documents, namely the PRD, NAEYC/IRA, and the ECCD checklist. What follows is a description of the oral language components highlighted in the Kinder Curriculum Guide (KCG) and it ends with a discussion of the strengths and gaps in the KCG.

Oral language components in the early language and literacy documents

The initial inquiry in this research sought to determine the oral language components evident in the early language and literacy reference documents. A holistic development of language can only occur if the articulated competencies are able to cover the essential components of language. It is therefore important that the individual competencies in each reference document undergo content analysis so that they can be classified according to language components each one addresses.

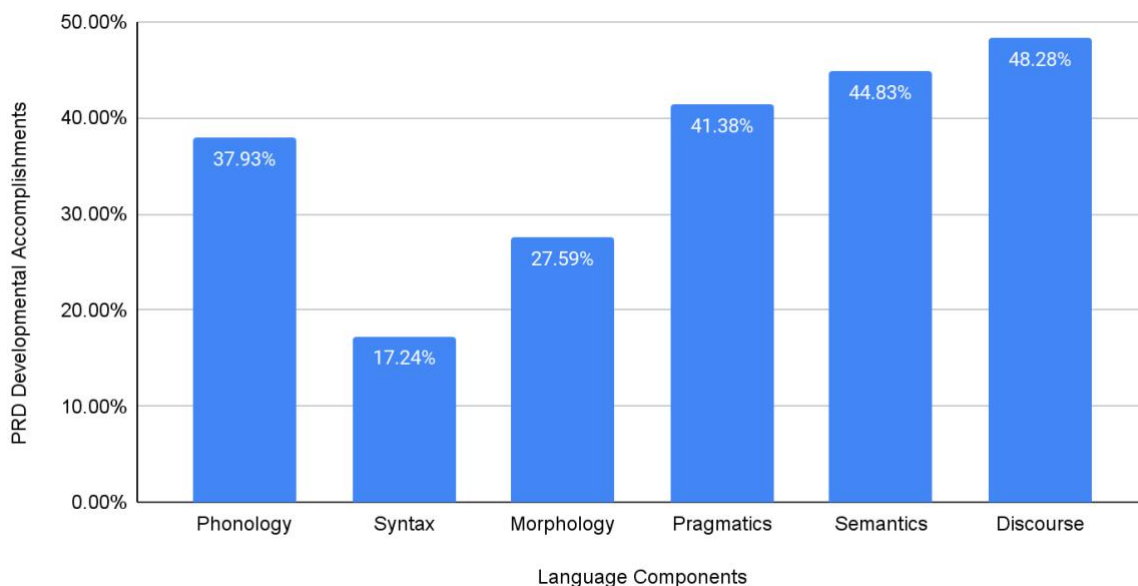
For instance, in the PRD document, Table 3 presents that the skill of *using new vocabulary and grammatical constructions in one's own speech* was classified under five language components, namely syntax, morphology, pragmatics, semantics, and discourse. Similarly, *noticing when simple sentences fail to make sense* covers four linguistic components: syntax, pragmatics, semantics, and discourse. The mapping suggests the interrelatedness of language since some competencies may be classified under more than one language component. This yielded percentages to reflect which are the most/least evident linguistic component for the competencies in the document.

Table 3
Evident Language Components in the (Preventing Reading Difficulties) PRD Document

PRD	Phonology	Syntax	Morphology	Pragmatics	Semantics/ Vocabulary	Discourse
Uses new vocabulary and grammatical constructions in own speech		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Notices when simple sentences fail to make sense		✓		✓	✓	✓

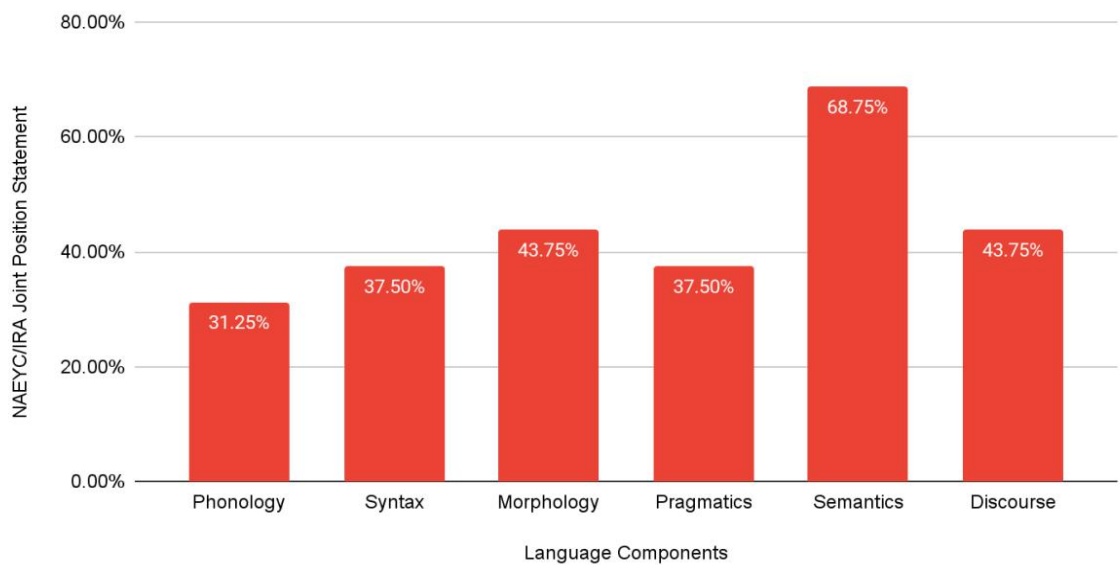
As shown in Figure 5, the mapping of the PRD document displays a breakdown of all language components that are evident at the kindergarten level. Discourse is the linguistic component most noticeable in the early years at 48.28%. Next is semantics at 44.83%, followed by pragmatics at 41.38%, phonology at 37.93%, and morphology at 27.59%. The least evident among the components is syntax at 17.24%.

Figure 5
Language Components in the PRD Developmental Accomplishments



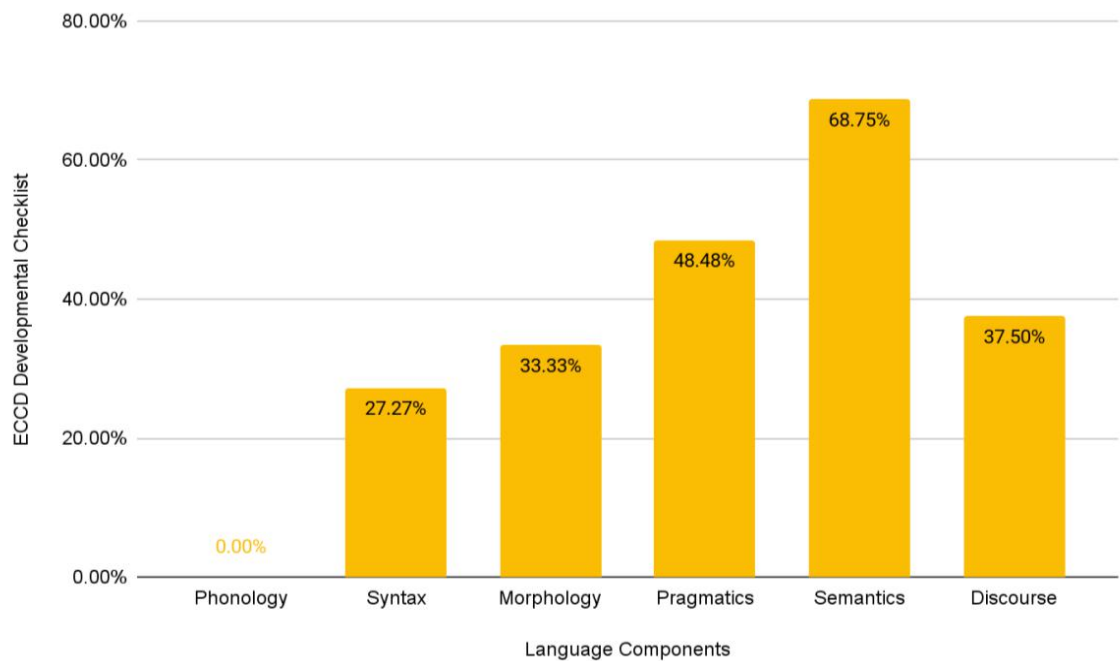
A similar result is shown in Figure 6 with all the language components addressed at the kindergarten level in the mapping of the NAEYC/IRA joint position statement. Semantics is the linguistic component highly present in the early years at 68.75%. Next are discourse and morphology, both at 43.75%, and semantics and syntax, both at 37.50%. The least evident among the components is phonology at 31.25%.

Figure 6
Language Components in the NAEYC/IRA Joint Position Statement



If we now turn to the ECCD local resource, it can be seen from Figure 7 that the most evident linguistic component is similar to the NAEYC/IRA findings, with semantics at a similar percentage of 68.75%. The other language components in the ECCD resource centered on the following: pragmatics at 48.48%, discourse at 37.50%, morphology at 33.33%, and syntax at 27.27%. Phonology was not present in the list of ECCD competencies.

Figure 7
Language Components in the ECCD Developmental Checklist



The presence of the six linguistic components is apparent in the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of the three reference documents. This corroborates with the literature that all these language components are essential in oral language development. These occur in varying degrees although the ECCD Developmental Checklist registers the absence of phonology. A possible reason for this is that the items in the checklist were based on statistical validation and the needs of the Filipino child. This indicates that phonology may not be identified as part of these needs.

What is striking about the results is that semantics is highly present (44.83% to 68.75%) in all the reference documents. The PRD developmental accomplishments registered discourse as the most evident at 48.28% while this was present in the other two documents at 37.50% to 43.75%. Likewise, pragmatics was evident from 37.50% to 48.28% in the three reference resources.

In summary, all the language components were evident in the early language and literacy documents although in varying degrees. Of interest is that there were language competencies due to their nature, that were classified across several language components. These suggest that these documents in principle offer a holistic view of language development.

Oral language components highlighted in the Kinder Curriculum Guide (KCG)

Figure 8 presents the results of the mapping of the KCG according to the oral language components. What is seen is that all the six language components are present in the KCG ranging from a low of 8.22% (morphology) to a high of 52.05% (pragmatics). Evident is the high presence of pragmatics and semantics in the KCG.

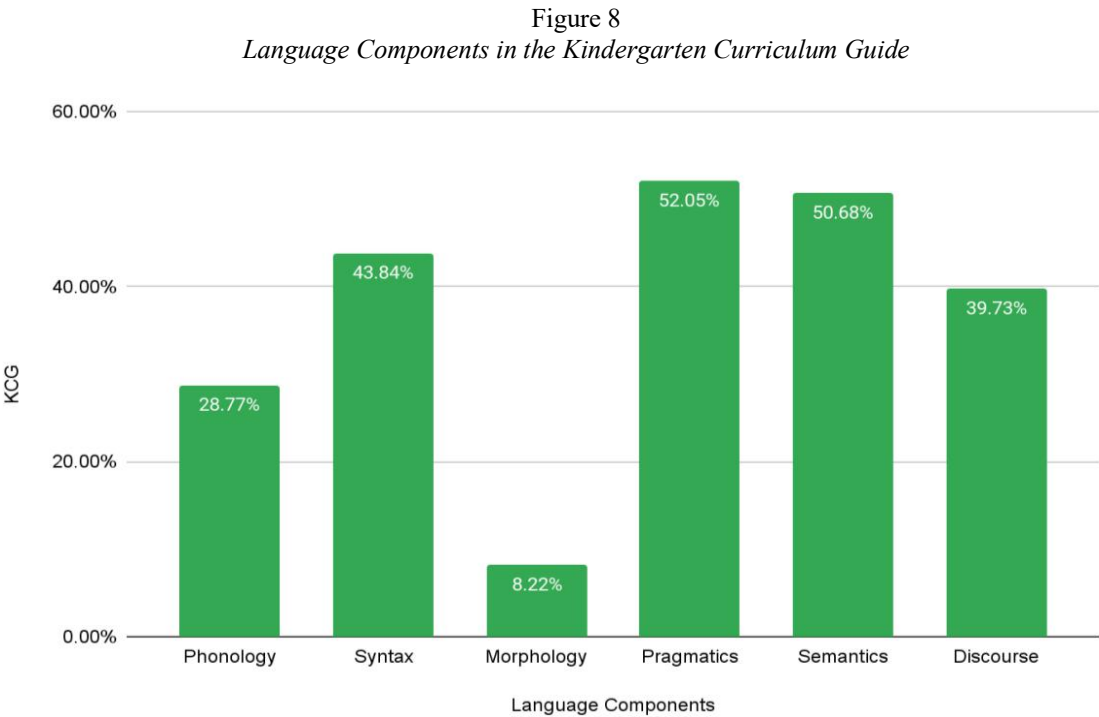
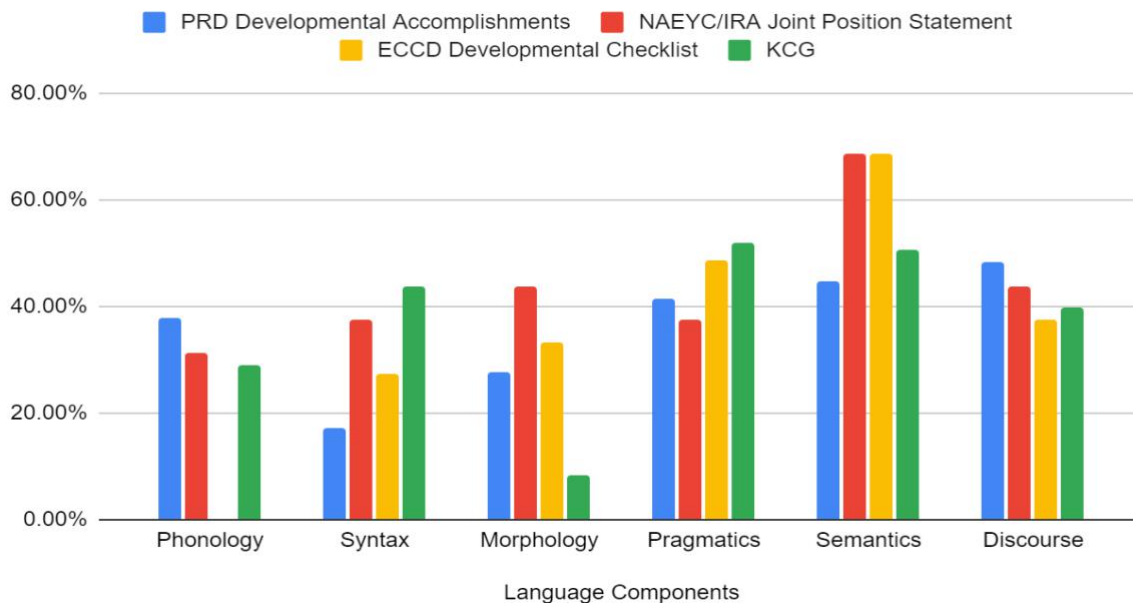


Figure 9 presents the language components present in the KCG in comparison with those evident in the three reference documents discussed earlier.

Figure 9



It is apparent that pragmatics (52.05%) stands out as the most evident component

in the KCG and this is also present in the three reference documents although at varying levels (ECCD document at 48.8%; PRD developmental accomplishments at 41.38%, and NAEYC/IRA at 37.5%).

Semantics (50.68%) is the next linguistic component that is highly present in the KCG. In comparison, the NAEYC/IRA and ECCD documents register this component at a higher percentage, both at 75 %. Interestingly, the results show that syntax is the third highly evident KCG competency at 43.48%. The three reference documents display results on this at lower percentages (NAEYC/IRA: 37.50; ECCD:27.7; and PRD developmental accomplishments: 17.24). The KCG registered discourse as the fourth evident language component at 39.73% while the other reference documents show less than a 10% difference from this figure (ECCD: 37.5; NAEYC/IRA: 43.75; and PRD developmental accomplishments: 48.28).

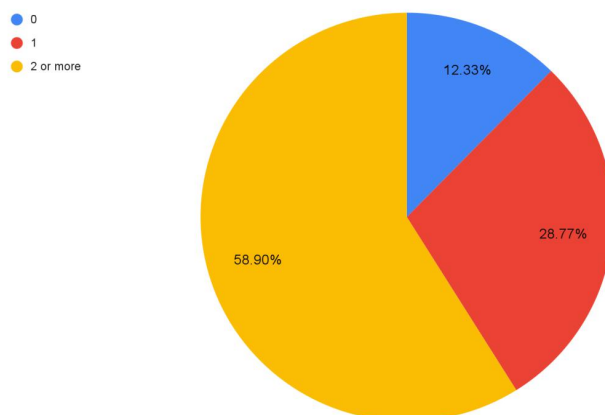
Phonology is the next evident KCG competency at 28.77%. Two reference documents display results on this at higher percentages (NAEYC/IRA: 31.25 and PRD literacy accomplishments: 37.93) while this was not present at all in the ECCD resource. Finally, results yielded morphology as the least evident skill in the KCG guide at 8.22%. In contrast, the reference documents showed this as more evident. (NAEYC/IRA: 43.75; ECCD: 33.33; and PRD developmental accomplishments: 27.59).

The presence of all the language components in the KCG, although in varying degrees, indicate the interrelatedness of these components when targeting the development of oral language. This finding broadly supports the literature that identifies these as important linguistic components. While the proportion of the different language components varies in the reference documents and the KCG, what is evident is the presence of all these components, with pragmatics and semantics being highly apparent.

Further analysis of the KCG was undertaken to determine how many language component/s were addressed in each of the 73 covered competencies. The competencies were classified according to the oral language components and were then subjected to percentile scoring.

Results yielded the distribution as to how many linguistic components are addressed in each particular KCG competency. The presentation of findings will focus on the presence of 0, 1, or 2 or more linguistic components in the KCG competencies. Figure 10 displays a summary of these percentages. The results suggest the interrelatedness of language components in the KCG.

Figure 10
Percentages of Language Components Addressed in the KCG



Findings from the curriculum mapping of the KCG competencies and the linguistic components further reveal that 58.90 % of the 73 examined competencies may be classified under two or more language components. As shown in Table 4, 19.18% of these competencies were identified as under the sub-domains of listening comprehension (19.18%); oral language at 16.44%; and vocabulary development at 10.96%. Almost 29 % of the 73 competencies were classified under a single language component. Covered sub-domains in this category include alphabet knowledge at 13.70% and phonological awareness at 9.59%, among others. These results further confirm the interrelatedness of the oral language components as reflected in the KCG competencies.

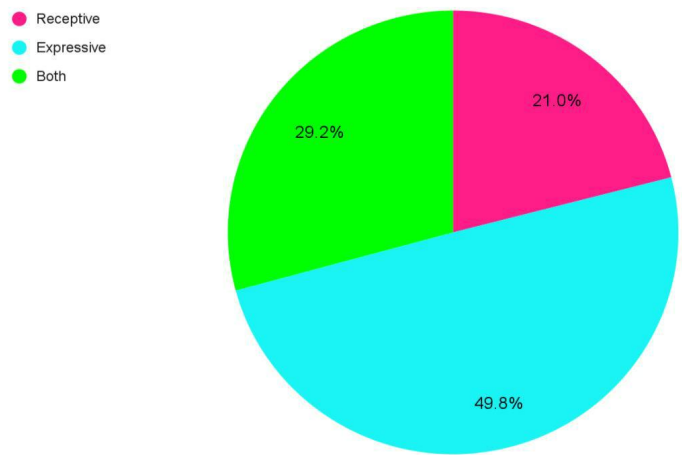
Table 4
Oral Language Components reflected in KCG Competencies

Number of Oral Language Components Addressed	Subdomain in the KCG	Number of Competencies Covered	Percentage
0	Auditory perception and discrimination	4	5.48
	Visual perception and discrimination	1	1.37
	Book and print awareness	2	2.74
	Alphabet knowledge	2	2.74
1	Auditory perception and discrimination	2	2.74
	Visual perception and discrimination	2	2.74
	Phonological awareness	7	9.59
	Alphabet knowledge	10	13.70
2 or more	Visual perception and discrimination	2	2.74
	Oral language	12	16.44
	Phonological awareness	1	1.37
	Book and print awareness	6	8.22
	Vocabulary development	8	10.96
	Listening comprehension	14	19.18

While linguists do not specify which among these six linguistic components are to be prioritized, the curriculum mapping analysis suggests that pragmatics and semantics are highly given emphasis in the KCG. A possible explanation for this is that self-expression and the development of communicative skills are included as expectations in the Language. Literacy & Communication domain of the KCG. Pragmatics involves the use of appropriate language, and conversational turn-taking in social interactions while semantics pertain to making sense of the meaning of words. This is consistent with literature that highlights conversational skills as the focus of language development during these early years, which enriches the use of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS).

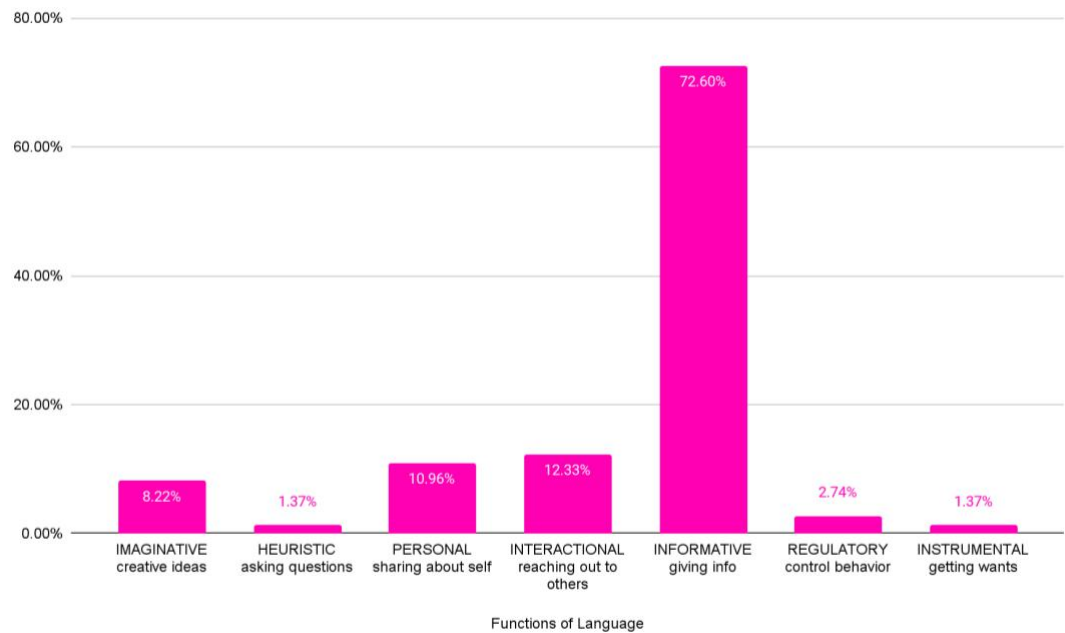
In line with the emphasis of the KCG on pragmatics and semantics, it becomes necessary to further examine oral language closely in terms of the expressive and receptive modes. The mapping of the KCG according to these modes is displayed in Figure 11. Almost half or 49 % of the 73 KCG competencies were classified as expressive language skills while 21 % were identified as expressive skills. Twenty-nine percent of the competencies were categorized as addressing both expressive and receptive language.

Figure 11
Language Modes Evident in KCG Competencies



To further understand the nature of pragmatic language in the context of the KCG, a final mapping of the competencies focused on the functions of language. The results are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12
Functions of Language evident in KCG Competencies



Of the 73 competencies, what is striking is that 72.60 % address the informative function of language. The other language functions addressed include :interactional (12.33%), personal (10.96%), imaginative (8.22%), and regulatory (2.74%). The least evident were instrumental and heuristic functions, both at 1.37%. This indicates that the highly evident language function of

giving information in the KCG somehow coincides with the higher presence of the expressive mode of language as reported earlier.

Strengths and gaps in the KCG

Closer inspection of the findings on how oral language is reflected in the KCG yields a number of strengths. All the oral language components were identified as represented in the KCG, although in varying proportions. The overlaps in the classification of the competencies indicate the interrelatedness of language. It is important to recognize the nature of language wherein language components may merge or may be differentiated. There were identified receptive and expressive skills which suggest the communicative aspect of language, which is the recommended emphasis for this early level. All language functions in the context of pragmatic language were evident at different levels.

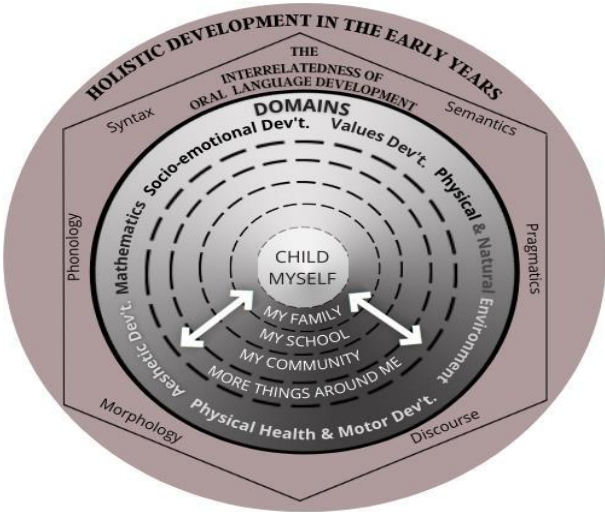
On the other hand, it is worth noting that morphology was least emphasized among the linguistic components. While formal instruction on morphology is not recommended at kindergarten, there are developmentally appropriate ways that this can take place. Likewise, the proportion of expressive and receptive language in the KCG indicates a greater focus on the development of expressive language. This may be revisited to create a balance between these two. Moreover, there could be more diverse communicative opportunities that allow for different language functions since the function of language greatly addressed was informative in nature. Examining this may further enrich the kindergarten target of self-expression and communicative competence. Moreover, the competencies under oral language that suggest overlaps in content include the following: Talk about one’s personal experiences/narrate events of the day; Talk about likes/dislikes (foods, pets, toys, games, friends, places); Talk about the details of an object/picture like toys, pets, foods, places; and Talk about family members, pets, toys, foods, or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words. The content or focus of these competencies may use a more general term so teachers have more flexibility in contextualizing at the instruction level.

Finally, the results draw our attention to the fact that the KCG is contextualized around five curricular themes that gradually move from the child to his/her enlarging world. In line with this, curriculum delivery should be best anchored on the learners’ unique setting and background. This is in congruence with the defining features of the kindergarten program with its emphasis on child-centeredness and developmental appropriateness, among others. This highlights the provision of meaningful experiences that promote the learners’ holistic development in the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and intellectual domains. The Omnibus Policy on Kindergarten Education (Department of Education, 2016a) specifically stipulates flexibility and the contextualization of the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. This implies that the learners’ communicative contexts should primarily take into account their socio-cultural backdrop. Consequently, these form the foundation of oral language development and instruction, whether the focus is the receptive or expressive modes. This aspect though is not included in the scope of this research.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the analysis of the KCG, we recommend the following Kindergarten Curriculum Framework:

Figure 12
Recommended Framework for Developing Oral Language in the Kindergarten Curriculum



The results of the review show that the kindergarten curriculum guide incorporates the six components of language and acknowledges the interrelatedness of these. However, the socio-cultural embeddedness of language has yet to be recognized and incorporated. In light of this, the Recommended Framework for Developing Oral Language in the Kindergarten Curriculum proposes a child-centered point of view wherein oral language development is viewed within a cultural and social matrix. This is drawn from the cultural microsystem model (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017), which is a revision of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. The participants in the communication process may interact within the various social environments available in society. The child's culture is embedded in these communicative contexts as the basis for oral language instruction that promotes a holistic approach to education in the early years. Language does occur in a sociocultural context recognizing the transactional nature of human development. But rather than adopting the spiral framework proposed in the revision of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, this model adopts the use of broken lines that distinguish each system. This recognizes how the actors in a transactional model can move from one system to another.

Based on the foregoing discussion, we recommend the following:

- a. Language development must occur within a context. Teachers could broaden home-school partnerships to maximize the children's communicative context at home. Researchers may also examine the sociocultural influences and implications to oral language practices and education.
- b. The formulation of competencies and standards may be further reviewed for clarity and explicitness to help teachers properly contextualize instructional components.
- c. Consider a balance between developing receptive and expressive language skills to reflect the communicative aspect of language use.
- d. Consider an integrated/ holistic approach when developing language skills. Given the interrelatedness of the linguistic components, a more integrated lens should be taken when analyzing curricular content and observing language instruction.
- e. A comprehensive review of DepEd curricula in the content areas is necessary to determine if oral language competencies are articulated to develop cognitive academic language proficiency in the various disciplines. It is important to consider that language development is a continuum and the mapping of language competencies per grade level must cohere.
- f. Based on the process undertaken, conducting mapping procedures as part of curricular analysis is recommended in highlighting the strengths and gaps of the curriculum based on established frameworks. Using curriculum mapping as a tool in curricular analysis and designing and monitoring the curriculum is beneficial in the enhancement and revision of programs.
- g. The recommended framework may still be validated by other stakeholders to ensure its generalizability and application in various contexts.

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