

Article

Quality Assessors' Feedback and Recommendations on Music Education in Hong Kong Kindergartens

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Abstract: In Hong Kong, quality assessors from the Education Bureau (EDB) visit kindergartens to conduct Quality Review (QR) assessments. Their written reports, therefore, reflect the official local perspective of quality kindergarten education. We conducted a content analysis of 323 QR reports focusing on the positive and negative feedback and recommendations for improvement regarding music education. Two coding schemes were developed using an inductive approach. High inter-reliability was obtained. The most frequently mentioned positive feedback codes were related to sufficient exposure to music and enjoyable musical learning experiences. In contrast, there were negative feedback codes pointing out that children's musical exposure was insufficient at Kindergarten 3 (children aged 5–6 years), and some musical activities were poorly prepared and/or designed. Children's music learning outcomes were rarely mentioned in the reports. The analyses indicate that the local understanding of kindergarten music education strongly emphasizes exposing children to enjoyable musical activities, with a lower focus on the nature and quality of musical learning. We conclude that the QR reports reflect a teacher-centric view of music education. Findings may inform curriculum designers and teacher educators about EDB's expectations in the area of music education. Future research should explore the perspectives of other kindergarten stakeholders such as teachers, principals, and teacher educators.

Keywords: early childhood education; quality assessment; pedagogical practices; music education; music curriculum



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1. Introduction

Quality assessors from the Education Bureau (EDB) in Hong Kong conduct Quality Review (QR) assessments for kindergartens. The assessors visit kindergartens to conduct on-site reviews and write the QR reports. Considering that no existing research explores the perspectives of official quality assessors on quality music pedagogical practices, it is therefore crucial to address this research gap. We conducted a content analysis of 323 QR reports focusing on the positive and negative feedback and recommendations for improvement regarding music education, given that those reports are a large-scale database reflecting the official local perspective of quality kindergarten education. Findings inform stakeholders (e.g., curriculum designers and teacher educators) about EDB's perspectives and expectations in kindergarten music education.

2. Literature Review

The literature review is structured into two sub-sections. Section 2.1 reviews the international literature about perspectives on quality music education by various early childhood education (ECE) stakeholders (i.e., teachers, teacher educators, scholars) and musical practices in ECE centers. The Section 2.2 introduces Hong Kong's kindergarten music education curriculum and the QR mechanism.

2.1. Perspectives and Practices on ECE Music Education around the World

There is widespread agreement among ECE scholars regarding the importance of implementing child-centric musical practices, in which “children are viewed as active constructors of knowledge and the teachers’ role is mainly to facilitate their learning in the classroom” ([1], p. 146). Children should be provided with opportunities to contribute and express their musical ideas and thoughts during diversified and enjoyable musical activities with play elements and high freedom of choice [2,3]. Young [4] argued that children learn music best through play-based approaches, as these are child-centered and foster children’s holistic development. Similarly, Chung [3] demonstrated well-known music education pedagogies using play-based approaches. Children actively participated in diverse musical activities with substantial play elements, such as performing rhythmic movements, playing musical instruments, and producing musical improvisations. Juntunen [5] concurred that children should be given opportunities to explore different ways to move and vary their movements in response to music. Noteworthy, Koops and Kuebel [6] argued that children’s enjoyment is key to quality music learning. In their view, it is essential to analyze whether children enjoy the musical activities implemented in classrooms and observe how children express their enjoyment. These authors have therefore encouraged ECE teachers to develop and adjust lesson plans and curricula with references to children’s interests and pace of learning, in order to enhance the effectiveness of music teaching and learning.

In prior interview studies, ECE teachers highlighted the importance of their own role as facilitators of quality music education, predominately focusing on how teachers should prepare, design, and implement musical activities in ECE classrooms [7,8]. For example, in an interview study conducted in the United States by Flores [9], kindergarten teachers suggested quality teaching examples to integrate music with other learning areas. Participants recommended designing musical activities such as singing songs in different languages to expose children to foreign languages, and drawing/making an instrument to promote children’s musical creativity and expression. In China, Robertson et al. [7] conducted an interview study to explore kindergarten teachers’ perspectives on children’s engagement in group musical activities. Teachers recommended implementing theme-based activities that utilize singing, movement, and instruments to play out a pretend scenario (e.g., a theme or story). They also expressed that teachers should engage children in appreciating different music genres rather than only singing numerous songs accurately. Denac [10] highlighted that preschool teachers in Slovenia play a crucial role in cultivating children’s interest in listening and reproducing quality musical learning outcomes. Teachers were responsible for raising children’s interests in music, creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere, selecting songs that aligned with children’s interests, and encouraging children’s active participation in musical activities. In sum, research shows that ECE teachers are aware of the need to provide children with adequate instruction and materials to experiment with and explore diverse instruments and rhythmic movements when conducting musical activities [7,9].

Some studies have documented examples of good musical classroom practices in ECE settings, aligned with the principles of sufficient provision and enjoyment mentioned above [2,11]. In the United States, Rajan [12] documented the case of preschool teachers who spent ample time singing nursery rhymes with young children. The songs’ themes were mainly in relation to letters, numbers, shapes, and counting, aiming to facilitate children’s development in other learning areas (e.g., language and mathematics) through music. Schei and Ødegaard [13] documented the case of ECE teachers in Norway conducting a child-centered music exploration theme-based activity, in which children created a story and improvised movements in response to music to express themselves. Koops and Kuebel [6] found that preschool teachers in the United States usually provide children with freedom of choice. For example, teachers allowed children to decide whether they participate in movement or vocal activities by choosing a dice representing the activity. Hence, children enjoyed and showed a high enthusiasm for participating in the musical activities.

In contrast to these examples of quality musical practices, prior research in regular ECE classrooms has reported multiple cases of lack of diversity, poor design, and implementation

of the musical activities [14,15]. Bautista et al. [15] reported that preschool teachers in Singapore usually conducted musical activities heavily focused on reproduction (e.g., following teachers' instructions to sing and move), yet lacked creative-fostering elements and exposure to diverse music genres. A similar issue of the lack of focus on musical creativity has been recently identified in Hong Kong kindergartens [16]. In Australia, Garvis [17] found that ECE teachers rarely provided opportunities for children to select their musical activities. The activities conducted in classrooms were teacher-directed and did not align with children's interests. Ersoy and Dere [14] found that around half of the ECE teachers in Turkey did not let children play musical instruments due to instrument deficiency in the classroom. Finally, ECE teachers in countries such as Spain [18] and Singapore [15] voiced challenges in implementing quality musical practices due to the lack of quality teaching materials and ideas for designing creative musical activities and games.

2.2. Kindergarten Music Education in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, where the present study was conducted, kindergartens offer center-based education programs for children aged three to six. Most children (around 63%) attend half-day programs (3–4 h), while some attend full-day (37%) programs, which also provide care services. The Education Bureau (EDB), a government agency, oversees and subsidizes the operations of local kindergartens, which are managed by non-profit or private organizations [19]. To strengthen kindergarten education quality, the EDB designed the Kindergarten Education Scheme [20] to offer government subsidies to most local kindergartens in Hong Kong [21].

In 2017, the EDB published a new curriculum framework, the Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide (KECG)—hereafter the Guide [22]. The Guide emphasizes the core value of "child-centeredness" with the idea that each child is unique. Music is included as a subdomain of the learning area "Arts and Creativity". The Guide [22] proposed that teachers offer children sufficient daily musical activities. In particular, children in full-day and half-day kindergartens should be provided with arts, musical, and physical activities for 45–60 min and 90–105 min each day, respectively. The activity types should be diversified. For example, children express their feelings and creativity through facial expression, voice, and movement, and they explore sound effects and timbre utilizing a variety of methods. Children can enjoy the fun of music by actively participating in musical activities.

The performance indicators for kindergartens [23] were established by the EDB in 2017, aiming to assess the teaching and learning quality for the various learning areas in the Guide (e.g., Early Childhood Mathematics, Language [Chinese], Second Language [English], Nature and Living). The performance indicators related to music education revolve around two areas: (1) provision and formats of the musical activities and (2) musical learning outcomes and experiences. First, teachers are required to provide children with sufficient daily musical activities in which teachers can flexibly adjust the daily schedule. These musical activities must be arranged using different classroom formats (i.e., whole-class, group, and individual). Second, the performance indicators set specific expectations for children, mainly related to positive learning outcomes and enjoyable musical experiences. For instance, children should be: "able to sing simple songs, play musical instruments", "fond of their own work, enjoy music activities, love singing and listening to music", "able to express the elements of music, e.g., dynamics, tempo and pitch, through singing and movements", "able to create and express feelings and thoughts through different art forms, and show creativity through art and crafts, music, role-playing, imaginative play, etc." ([23], pp. 80–82).

The EDB's perspective on quality music education in kindergartens is reflected in these performance indicators, given that the EDB established these performance indicators and kindergartens are required to achieve these performance indicators [23]. Overall, the local curriculum learning objectives and performance indicators are aligned with the standards and expectations in early childhood music education across the globe [11,24].

All kindergartens participating in the Kindergarten Education Scheme [20] are required to undergo an assessment mechanism called Quality Review (QR) [25], which uses the performance indicators [23] as the standard of quality education. The objectives of the QR assessment are to inform the public about the present state and quality of kindergarten education in Hong Kong and to disseminate excellent practices among kindergartens, ultimately strengthening the quality of kindergarten education provided to children [20,25]. During the QR period, the EDB assessor teams visit kindergartens for 2.5 to 3.5 days to conduct on-site reviews. The primary duties are to observe lessons, inspect children's work, review the kindergarten documents, and interview the kindergarten personnel (i.e., principals, teachers, parents, and children) [25]. These on-site reviews serve as the basis for the assessors to write the QR reports and determine whether the kindergarten can pass the quality assurance. To enhance the transparency of this exercise, the QR reports of those kindergartens that successfully pass the assessment are made public on the EDB website [26]. Those kindergartens obtain government subsidies [20].

A content analysis of 164 QR reports focused on exploring the types of musical activities in kindergartens was conducted [27]. We found that while the most prevalent musical activities were related to children's development of sensory abilities through music experiences (e.g., singing, rhythm, beat, movement, and instrumental music), activities related to musical creativity and self-expression were rarely mentioned in the QR reports. We concluded that important inconsistencies existed between the official curriculum guide and actual musical activities provided in kindergartens. However, that study was particularly focused on the musical activity types. Other aspects pertaining to music teaching and learning (e.g., children's music learning outcomes, teachers' design and implementation of the musical activities) were unexplored.

Significant research gaps are reflected in our review of the international literature. First, no existing research explores the perspectives of official quality assessors on quality music pedagogical practices. Therefore, it is vital to delve into the official and local expectations of quality music education. Second, previous research on the perspectives of ECE stakeholders on quality music education has mostly used qualitative methods and included small participant samples [6]. Some are non-empirical articles [2]. Further quantitative research is therefore required. Lastly, prior studies on kindergarten music practices in Hong Kong are limited and conducted a decade ago [28]. Updated research is needed to obtain further insight into the practical implementation of the current local music curriculum.

3. Goals

With the final aim of exploring the perspectives of EDB assessors on quality music pedagogical practices, this study presents a content analysis of the QR reports focusing on music classroom practices in Hong Kong kindergartens. The study has two specific research goals. Goal #1 was to analyze the positive feedback pertaining to music classroom practices in the reports. Goal #2 was to analyze the negative feedback and recommendations for improvements pertaining to music classroom practices in the reports. These QR reports comprise a large-scale database that reveals EDB's view of quality kindergarten education, given that all the kindergartens featured in these reports passed the quality assurance. Findings may therefore inform kindergarten stakeholders (mainly curriculum designers and teacher educators) about EDB's expectations in the area of music education [29].

4. Method

4.1. Data Sources

We conducted a content analysis on QR reports of 323 local kindergartens in Hong Kong. Content analysis is defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" ([30], p. 1278). We analyzed all the reports published in English from 2017 to 2023, which include: one report in 2017 (0.3%), 33 in 2018 (10.2%),

122 in 2019 (37.8%), 9 in 2020 (2.8%), 66 in 2021 (20.4%), 64 in 2022 (19.8%), and 28 in 2023 (8.7%). As these reports focus on kindergartens across all areas in Hong Kong, they provided a holistic overview of the music curriculum throughout the territory.

4.2. Procedure

The content analysis was conducted by adopting a four-stage process.

Stage 1: *Obtaining ethical approval and downloading the QR reports*. Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the authors' university. Then, we downloaded the 323 QR reports from the EDB's website [26] and imported them into MAXQDA Analytics Pro [31] for data analysis.

Stage 2: *Developing the coding schemes*. The authors applied an inductive approach to develop two coding schemes (i.e., one related to the positive feedback pertaining to music pedagogical practices, and another related to the negative feedback and recommendations for improvement). We applied the open coding approach to identify common themes in the reports. All the codes were derived inductively [30,32]. The coding schemes were presented in a table format, including the definitions and examples for each code. Examples were extracted literally from the QR reports for illustrative purposes. Codes were binary (i.e., Yes vs. No), depending on whether the report alluded (or not) to the idea at hand.

Stage 3: *Piloting of coding schemes*. The coding schemes were validated by the authors and one student helper. We randomly selected 35 reports to pilot the schemes. Definitions and examples were refined. We collapsed certain related feedback under the same code, given the low frequency of references to certain prior codes. For instance, feedback related to rhythm accuracy and creating simple melodies were both condensed under the code Positive Music Learning Outcome. High reliability was obtained in both coding schemes (i.e., 0.95 and 0.96, respectively), as measured by Cohen's (κ) kappa.

Stage 4: *Final coding*. The first author (Coder 1) trained a student helper (Coder 2) in the use of the two coding schemes. Coders 1 and 2 then analyzed all the reports independently. To ensure the reliability and consistency of the coding process, the coders discussed and resolved the disagreement until a 100% agreement was reached [33].

4.3. Data Analysis

The same set of statistical analyses were applied to address both Goal #1 and Goal #2. For each goal, we first presented the coding schemes (including the codes and their definitions) in the Results section. We utilized descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) of each code. Bar graphs were used to show the frequency of the codes, from most to least frequent. Literal examples extracted from the QR reports were presented to further illustrate the analytic codes and provide a narrative account of the findings [34]. The purposes of strategically using direct quotations include demonstrating the richness of the data, providing a qualitative reporting basis, serving as evidence, and enhancing readability [35–37].

5. Results

5.1. Goal#1: Positive Feedback Pertaining to Music Classroom Practices

A coding scheme with nine analytic codes (see Table 1) was designed. We introduce each code's definitions in Table 1 and present the examples in the body of the text.

Each report alluded to three codes on average (min = 0, max = 7, $SD = 1.82$). Figure 1 presents the frequencies and percentages for each code within the QR reports (in descending order).

The most frequently mentioned code for positive feedback was Sufficient Exposure to Music (70.9% of total reports). The reports typically included sentences appreciating that the kindergartens provided children with sufficient time to engage in musical activities daily (e.g., "regarding the daily schedule, children are arranged to have adequate time to engage in music activities every day"). This was followed by Enjoyable Musical Learning Experiences (42.7%). The reports described that children enjoyed and engaged happily in

the musical activities. The structure of those sentences mainly used children as the subject, expressing that children had fun (e.g., “children enjoy engaging in sing-along sessions and have great fun in music activities”) and enjoyed the musical activities happily (e.g., “children sing and dance happily”).

Table 1. Coding scheme for positive feedback pertaining to music classroom practices.

Code	Definitions
1. Sufficient Exposure to Music	References to children having enough daily exposure to music.
2. Diversified Music Activities and/or Elements	References to provision of diversified musical activities and/or elements in the classroom.
3. Enjoyable Musical Learning Experiences	References to children enjoying and/or showing enthusiasm about music learning.
4. Positive Music Learning Outcomes	References to children achieving positive music learning outcomes (i.e., demonstrating good music abilities, showing confidence about music learning) from the musical activities conducted.
5. Adequate and/or Suitable Learning Environment	References to the adequacy and/or appropriateness of the music learning environment (i.e., classroom or music room).
6. Different Formats	References to provision of musical activities that utilize different classroom formats (e.g., whole-class, small group, and/or individual learning).
7. Good Preparation and/or Design	References to teachers being well-prepared to conduct the musical activity and/or the good design of the music activity at hand.
8. Good Implementation	References to the good implementation of musical activities (e.g., giving clear instructions and/or using suitable questioning skills).
9. Teachers’ Positive Attitude and/or Responses	References to teachers’ positive attitude and/or responses during the musical activity.

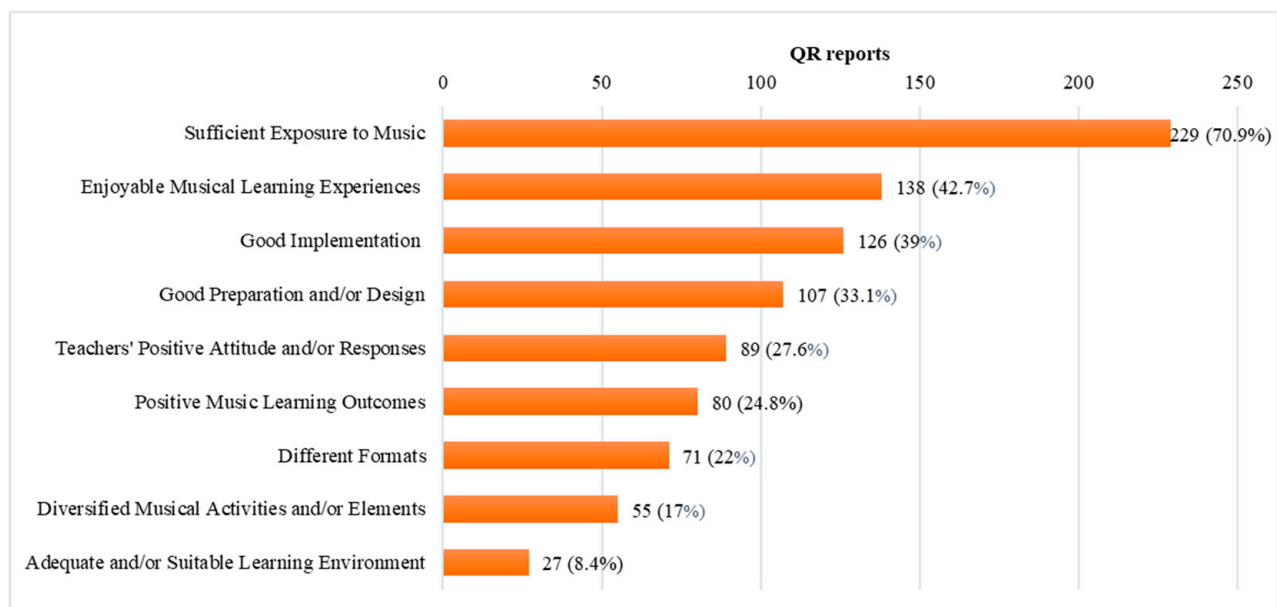


Figure 1. Frequencies and percentages of QR reports coded under each category of positive feedback ($n = 323$).

The following three analytic codes focusing on teachers’ performance were identified in around one-third of the reports. The subject of those sentences was primarily teachers. The first code in this group was Good Implementation (39%). The reports positively commented that teachers implemented and led the musical activities properly (e.g., “teachers

are good at conducting music activities, using interesting stories as an entry point to lead children to sing, play percussion instruments and musical games”), giving clear instructions and using appropriate questioning skills (e.g., “teachers suitably use questioning and prompts to stimulate children’s thinking in music activities”). The second was Good Preparation and/or Design (33.1%). The reports appreciated that teachers were well-prepared for their music teaching (e.g., “teachers design music activities with great efforts to facilitate children to enjoy the fun of music activities”), and that teachers designed and organized the musical activities with a clear structure (e.g., “teachers design music activities with careful thoughts, organizing structured activities that allow children to enjoy music games”). The third code in this group was Teachers’ Positive Attitude and/or Responses (27.6%). The reports utilized various positive adjectives such as amicable, friendly, and promptly to describe teachers’ attitudes (e.g., “teachers are amicable and friendly with smiling faces in theme-related music activities”) and/or their responses to children in class (e.g., “teachers respond to children’s questions promptly in music activities”).

The remaining four codes of positive feedback were mentioned in just a handful of the reports (less than 25%). One of them was Positive Music Learning Outcomes (24.8%), indicating that children had achieved positive music learning outcomes (e.g., “children can create new words and actions to songs in order to unleash their creativity”) and demonstrated good musical learnings as a result of the music class (e.g., “children demonstrate a good sense of rhythm when beating the musical instruments”). Another code was Different Formats (22%). These reports mentioned that teachers organized their classrooms in distinct formats when conducting musical activities (e.g., “in music activities, children also have the opportunities to participate in whole-class, group, and individual learning activities”). Diversified Musical Activities appeared only in 17% of the reports, which described that teachers arranged a wide variety of musical activities for children such as singing, doing rhythmic movements, and playing musical instruments (e.g., “teachers organize diversified activities for children when conducting music activities”). The least-mentioned code was Adequate and/or Suitable Learning Environment (8.4%). These reports described that teachers were able to arrange adequate space for children to engage in musical activities (e.g., “teachers flexibly spare more space for conducting whole-class music games by moving the desks and chairs in the classroom”).

5.2. Goal#2: Negative Feedback and Recommendations for Improvement Pertaining to Music Classroom Practices

Table 2 presents the names and definitions of each code. Examples will be included in the body of the text.

Each report alluded to one code on average (min = 0, max = 5, $SD = 1.07$). Note that values were lower than the positive feedback codes in Goal #1. Figure 2 presents the frequencies and percentages for each code within the QR reports (in descending order).

The most frequently mentioned code for negative feedback and recommendations was Insufficient Exposure to Music (29.7% of total reports). These reports mainly criticized that children in specific grades, especially K3, were not provided with enough time for musical activities daily due to being occupied by the kindergarten primary transition activities (e.g., “when the school arranges activities to prepare K3 children for the interface between kindergarten and primary school, it fails to provide adequate music activities on a daily basis”). Therefore, the reports further recommended that the school should provide children in each grade with sufficient exposure to music (e.g., “the school is required to improve the daily schedule of half-day classes to make sure that sufficient music activities are arranged for children of each grade level”).

This was followed by the other two analytic codes focusing on teachers’ performance, in which the teacher was the subject. The first code was Poor Preparation and/or Design (16.4%). These reports commented negatively that the musical activities were poorly designed and unsuitable for children in that grade level (e.g., “teachers have not yet fully grasped the skills of designing integrated music activities”). Hence, the reports recom-

mended that teachers should be better prepared to improve the design of the musical activities (e.g., “teachers are advised to design sing-along activities that can inspire children’s imagination and creativity”). The next code was Poor Implementation (13.6%). These reports commented that teachers conducted the musical activities poorly, hence undermining the teaching and learning effectiveness (e.g., “teachers place too much emphasis on explaining the rules of the games during the activities but seldom guide children to take note of the music elements in the games”). The reports, therefore, advised teachers to improve the implementation of musical activities by providing better guidance to children (e.g., “teachers should guide children to feel the beats and melodies of music, and encourage them to express their feelings using different forms”).

Table 2. Coding scheme for negative feedback and recommendations for improvement pertaining to music classroom practices.

Code		Definitions
1.	Insufficient Exposure to Music	References to children not having enough daily exposure to music, and/or recommendations of providing higher level of exposure to music.
2.	Undiversified Musical Activities	References to provision of musical activities not being diversified enough, and/or recommendations of arranging diversified music activities.
3.	Poor Musical Learning Experiences	References to teachers providing poor musical learning experiences, unable to raise children’s interest in music, and/or recommendations of providing enjoyable musical learning experiences to raise children’s interest.
4.	Poor Music Learning Outcomes	References to children cannot achieve the music learning outcomes (i.e., unable to master the music learning content, showing low learning effectiveness about music learning) from the musical activities conducted.
5.	Inadequate and/or Unsuitable Learning Environment	References to the music learning environment (i.e., classroom or music room) being inadequate and/or unsuitable, and/or recommendations of rearranging the music learning environment to be adequate and/or suitable.
6.	Undiversified Format	References to musical activities not having diversified classroom formats (e.g., whole-class, small group, and/or individual learning), and/or recommendations of adopting diversified classroom formats in musical activities.
7.	Poor Preparation and/or Design	References to teachers not being sufficiently prepared to conduct the musical activity and/or poor design of the musical activity at hand, and/or recommendations of teachers obtaining better preparation to conduct and/or design musical activities.
8.	Poor Implementation	References to the poor implementation of the musical activity (e.g., long waiting time, giving unclear instructions), and/or recommendations of teachers improving implementation quality (e.g., reducing the waiting time, giving clearer instructions).

The following codes for negative feedback and recommendations were mentioned in a very low percentage in the reports (between 0.5% and 7%). These included Poor Musical Learning Experiences (6.5%), in which the reports criticized teachers for providing children with poor musical learning experiences, hence being unable to raise children’s interest in music (e.g., “children lack opportunities for participation, causing it difficult to nurture their interests in music”). This was followed by Undiversified Musical Activities (3.7%) (e.g., “teachers only added a few singing activities in other learning activities”). Inadequate and/or Unsuitable Learning Environment was only identified in 3.1% of the reports (e.g., “when children are engaging in music activities, sometimes collisions happen due to inadequate space”). Poor Music Learning Outcomes were only mentioned in seven reports (2.2%). These reports commented that the learning objectives of the musical activities could not be achieved and suggested that teachers observe whether children could master the learning content (e.g., “when conducting music activities, teachers may pay more attention to children’s performance and observe their mastery of content”). Finally, the least-mentioned code was Undiversified Format (0.9%). The reports recommended that teachers arrange diversified classroom formats (e.g., “make flexible use of grouping strategies”) when conducting musical activities.

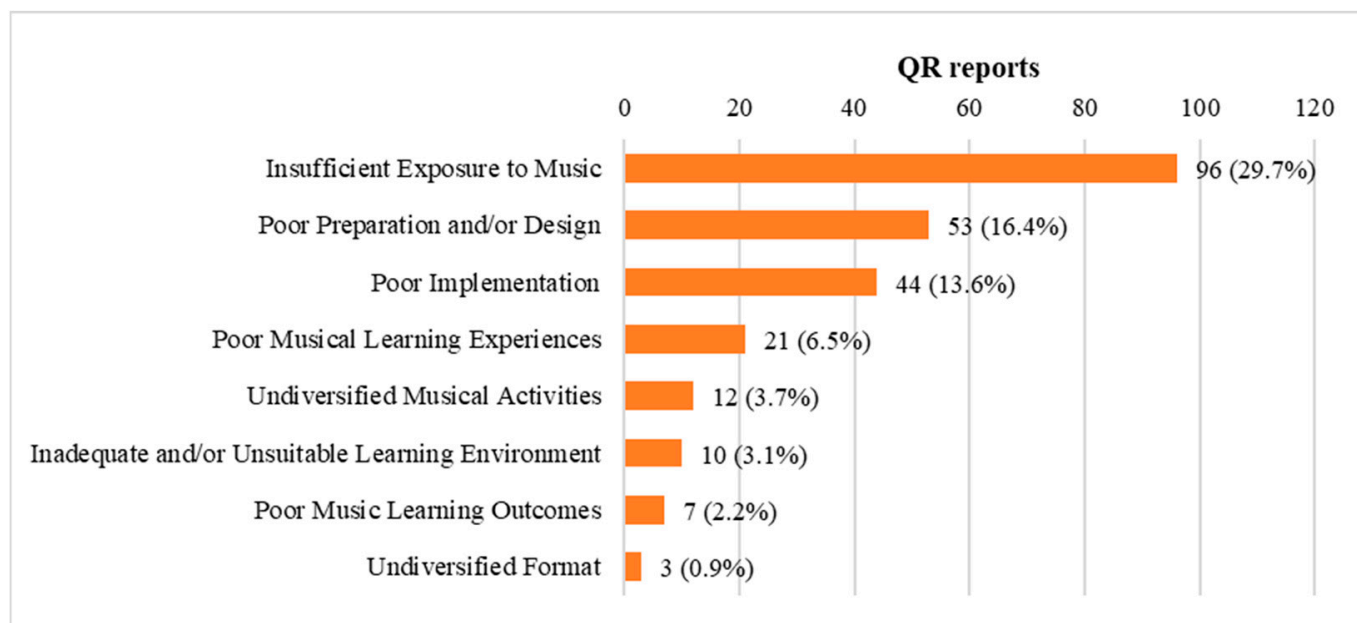


Figure 2. Frequencies and percentages of QR reports coded under each category of negative feedback and recommendations ($n = 323$).

6. Discussion

To better understand the official perspective of quality kindergarten education held by Hong Kong's EDB, specifically regarding music education, we conducted a content analysis of 323 QR reports focusing on the positive and negative feedback and recommendations for improvement in this area. A holistic analysis of the codes included in the two coding schemes designed for this study indicates that the EDB assessors focused on rather superficial, easily observable aspects of musical practices. Indeed, the most typical codes were related to the provision of enjoyable musical experiences. Assessors tended to focus predominantly on the role of teachers. In fact, more than half of the codes were teacher-oriented both regarding positive feedback (e.g., Good Implementation, Good Preparation and/or Design, Teachers' Positive Attitude and/or Responses) and negative feedback and recommendations (e.g., Poor Implementation, Poor Preparation and/or Design). In contrast, references to children's musical learning (e.g., Positive Music Learning Outcomes) hardly appeared in the QR reports.

More specifically, Goal #1 was to analyze the positive feedback pertaining to music classroom practices. The most frequently mentioned positive feedback was related to Sufficient Exposure to Music and Enjoyable Musical Learning Experiences. This suggests that QR assessors applied a somewhat superficial approach by only verifying whether engaging music activities were included in the curriculum. The code Sufficient Exposure to Music was often limited to a few sentences in the reports, stating that the kindergartens offered children sufficient time to participate in musical activities daily. Furthermore, we speculated that the assessors evaluated the enjoyment of musical experiences in a subjective manner, just based on their own observation of how much children enjoyed the music lesson. This lack of objectivity reflects the very nature of the key performance indicators [23], which also lack an observation scale or form to record children's signs of enjoyment involving affective responses, continuation, and on-task behavior as used in prior literature [6]. As such, the evaluation of children's musical enjoyment might vary among assessors.

In comparison, references to teachers' pedagogies (e.g., Good Implementation, Good Preparation and/or Design) or children's learning (Positive Music Learning Outcomes) were rather infrequent. None of the related codes appeared in more than 40% of the reports, which shows that commentaries on how teachers and children carried out the activities

were uncommon. References to the quality of teachers' performance were relatively more frequent compared to the codes about children's learning. Despite the fact that academic achievement is highly valued in Hong Kong [38], the assessors seldom ever offered any feedback related to children's musical learning. While the performance indicators [23] established expectations for children to attain specific positive learning outcomes, evaluating children's musical performance is complex and requires music-specific training [39]. Considering that the assessors might have limited knowledge and expertise with music, they might find it challenging to offer in-depth feedback [40]. Therefore, few assessors could only refer to superficial aspects, such as children singing accurately and creating simple melodies.

Goal #2 was to analyze the negative feedback and recommendations for improvements pertaining to music classroom practices in the reports. We found that these aspects were less frequent compared to positive feedback. The most common negative feedback was that K3 children were not provided with sufficient music exposure because they were required to participate in primary one stimulation activities. The reports further recommended that kindergartens modify the daily schedule to ensure children in every grade were provided with sufficient exposure to music. However, none of the negative feedback and recommendations codes appeared in more than 30% of the reports. Negative feedback and recommendations related to undiversified musical activities and poor music learning outcomes almost did not exist, even though prior studies have found that activities related to musical creativity and self-expression are rare in Hong Kong kindergartens [16]. These findings suggest that QR assessors might not be concerned about improving the quality of kindergarten music education. While most countries and jurisdictions prioritize children's linguistic and mathematics development in early childhood, non-academic areas such as music typically receive less attention [4,41].

Noteworthy, we found that the QR reports rarely offered recommendations for kindergartens and teachers to enhance the quality of music education. Some reports simply contained negative feedback without any recommendations for improvement, especially for the codes Undiversified Musical Activities and Inadequate and/or Unsuitable Learning Environment. Only a few reports provided valuable recommendations for improvement regarding the quality of musical practices, aligned with stakeholders' perspectives of quality music education based on the international literature [4,9]. For instance, the literature encourages teachers to design singing activities that stimulate children's creativity and inventiveness [2,11]. When implementing musical activities, teachers are recommended to focus on children's content mastery and performance [42]. It is concerning that the assessors were not specific about how to enhance current music education practices, as receiving feedback and recommendations is crucial for practitioners' continuous improvement and development [43]. Bautista and Ho [44] reported a critical need for Hong Kong kindergarten teachers to gain further insights into enhancing their music pedagogical instruction, especially in receiving detailed feedback and advice from experts on their music lessons. Improvements in how the QR exercise is conducted, specifically regarding music education practices, are therefore needed.

7. Conclusions

To conclude, our evidence reflects the official local perspective of kindergarten music education. The local understanding of kindergarten music education strongly emphasizes providing children in all grade levels with sufficient exposure to music, with a lower focus on the nature and quality of musical learning. While the EDB assessors concentrated on checking whether music was included in the classroom, the feedback was relatively superficial, not demonstrating a thorough comprehension of quality music education practices. International standards and expectations of quality music education have suggested that in addition to sufficient exposure to music, ECE teachers should design and implement high-quality music education activities that are child-centric, actively involved, and diverse [3,11]. Nevertheless, we rarely identified such features in the reports. In addition, the

QR reports tended to reflect a teacher-oriented perspective of kindergarten music education, given that teachers play a crucial role in facilitating quality music education [7,8]. However, the reports offered limited recommendations to improve teachers' music pedagogies and children's musical learning. Our findings are worrisome, given that these 323 kindergartens passed the quality assurance. Such superficial music-specific feedback and recommendations could bring a deceptive view that music education is an unimportant area [45]. As such, kindergartens might not completely exert the benefits of music for children's communication, self-expression, and creativity [42]. Considering that music learning is crucial for children's holistic development [46,47], we believe there is still much more stakeholders can accomplish to ensure the quality of kindergarten music education in Hong Kong.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the findings relied on a single data source (i.e., QR reports). The low presence of music-specific commentaries in the QR reports does not necessarily mean that teachers do not design and implement quality music activities. Rather, assessors might focus more on the quantity of music education than its quality during the QR observation period. It would be desirable to conduct studies based on other data sources, including classroom observations, interviews, and/or curriculum materials analysis. Second, the QR reports only focused on assessing the quality of local kindergartens. It would be worth investigating the quality of musical practices in international kindergartens. Finally, the QR reports reflected the EDB assessors' perspectives and understanding of music education. In the future, research should investigate the perspectives and understanding of other kindergarten stakeholders (i.e., teachers, principals, and teacher educators).

9. Practical Implications

Our findings have profound implications for kindergarten stakeholders, mainly QR assessors and curriculum designers, both in Hong Kong and worldwide. Quality assessors should offer more in-depth feedback and recommendations for practitioners to reflect on and eventually enhance their music practices. We identified specific teacher-oriented positive feedback that was detailed, though the frequency was relatively low. Therefore, we encourage the assessors to emphasize the quality of music teaching and offer detailed recommendations when they write the QR reports, with references to the quality features mentioned in the Literature Review section [2,11]. Such detailed recommendations could assist Hong Kong kindergarten teachers in obtaining ideas to enhance their music classroom practices [48], as reported by Bautista and Ho [44]. The second implication relates to the global need to enhance curriculum guidelines, standards, and regulations pertaining to music education [23]. In particular, there is an urgent need for more comprehensive and detailed evaluation instruments (e.g., observation forms, scales, tools). Given that assessing children's music enjoyment and learning outcomes is complex [39], we encourage curriculum designers to develop observation forms and/or scales to specifically evaluate these two aspects during musical activities. For example, curriculum designers could make references to the observation forms developed by Koops and Kuebel [6] and the evaluation tools by MacGlone [49]. Developing these evaluation instruments would not only help assessors to provide feedback on quality music teaching, but would also assist teachers in evaluating children's musical learning in their daily musical practices [50].

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