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Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

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Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

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1. Introduction and study background

In Hong Kong, the role played by English dictation in Hong Kong's Primary English Language Curriculum is significant as the use of English dictation is clearly stated as being a valid practice in the English language syllabuses of primary schools (Chiang, 2004). Dictation is defined as 'an activity that helps learners practice the skills of listening, spelling and handwriting under controlled or guided situations' by the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council (CDC, 2004, p.157). In Hong Kong, English dictation is generally used for assessment purposes as its marks contribute to learners' academic outcomes, which are recorded in the learners' report cards (Chiang, 2002). Thus, with English dictation taking up part of the subject total mark, the marks learners get in English dictation is often used as an indicator of the learners' English proficiency besides tests and exams by schools, teachers or learners themselves.

There are two types of assessment: formative assessment and summative assessment. The former one is 'an on-going assessment which teachers conduct continuously to look for specific information about learners' progress to inform learning and teaching' (CDC, 2004, p.191) whereas the latter one "is a more formal overall assessment that happens only periodically (e.g. at the end of a school term or school year) to measure attainment and provide a comprehensive summary of learners' achievements at that particular point of time' (CDC, 2004, p.191). Although English dictation is traditionally used as an assessment tool, primary schools are recommended to use it for collecting evidences of student learning so as to improve teaching and learning (CDC, 2004). With the formative use of English dictation being highlighted, the role played by teachers in the formative use of English dictation is also emphasized. According to the Education Commission (2000), quality teacher feedback to students and the strategies teacher use to adjust both their teaching and student learning are two crucial elements of making an assessment formatively. As teachers play a critical role in carrying out formative assessment successfully, it is important to explore English teachers' perceptions about using English dictation as formative assessment because their perceptions can influence the way they conduct English dictation to inform teaching and learning at schools. This is to provide a picture of how teachers' view towards using English dictation as formative

assessment, why they carry English dictation formatively and what they actually do in practice. To develop a deeper understanding in this area, 2 research questions are raised: 1) What are the perceptions of Hong Kong primary English teachers on using English dictations as formative assessment? 2) What are the challenges “using English dictation as formative assessment” present to Hong Kong primary English teachers and why? By finding answers to these questions through conducting a classroom-based research at a local primary school, this case study aims to extend the existing local research concerning the formative use of English dictation, hoping to gain insights into how English dictation can be utilized to cater for the best interest of Hong Kong students in English language learning.

This study contains 5 further components. Component 2 is the literature review on the use of English dictation and formative assessment in the Hong Kong context. Component 3 describes and justifies the methodology and the research method. The findings are described and in Component 4 while Component 5 contains a discussion of the findings including implications and suggestions. Key issues and insights of the study are summarized in Component 6 together with the limitations arising from the study.

2. Literature review

This session reviews several areas of literature concerning the use of English dictation and formative assessment, most importantly how they orchestrate in Hong Kong classroom to inform teaching and learning and what English teachers' perceptions about the formative use of English dictation are. This session first covers the definitions of formative assessment and then English dictation in Hong Kong. It then reviews the literature related to the use of English dictation as an assessment tool in Hong Kong. Finally, literature related to the perceptions of teachers both globally and in Hong Kong on conducting formative assessment is outlined.

2.1 English dictation in Hong Kong

There are various ways to define dictation. Some focuses on what learners can learn from dictation whereas some emphasizes on the procedure of conducting dictation. Concerning the former type, the HKCDC (1997) concluded dictation as 'an activity that helps learners practice the skills of listening, spelling and handwriting under controlled or guided situations' (p.74); on the other hand, Sawyer and Silver (1971, as cited in Alkire, 2001) identified four types of dictation in detail:

- a. The phonemic item dictation involves the teacher presenting to students the individual sounds of a language such as the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) coordinates for transcription. It enhances students' ability to recognize the sounds of a language, which facilitates the accurate production of a language.
- b. The phonemic text dictation involves the teacher reciting a passage for students to transcribe phonetically. It develops students' understanding on how English sounds change in connected speech.
- c. The orthographic item dictation involves students dictating individual words in isolation, helping students correlate the spelling system and sound system of a language.

d. The orthographic text dictation involves students transcribing a unified passage. The learning possibility of this dictation is the broadest as it reinforces not only the learners' spelling-sound correlation but also makes comprehension and grammatical weaknesses in learners visible to the teacher.

Dictation can also be defined more procedurally. Lynd (2001) defined English dictation in Hong Kong as 'a test-type dictation where the teacher reads aloud a passage, then dictates it in sense groups for students to write down and then rereads it. The passage is then marked' (p.2). Chiang (2002) defined dictation in more detail by categorizing dictation into 'seen dictation' and 'unseen dictation'. The former one is 'one which the sentences, passages or texts to be dictated are selected, extracted, adapted or rewritten from the textbook or set readers that learners have had the opportunity to study before doing the dictation' (Chiang, 2002, p.9) whereas the latter one is one 'which learners have not seen the sentences, passages or texts before or they have not been told or advised that those materials will be used as dictation' (CDC, 1997, p.74; Lynd, 2001, p.50).

2.2 Formative assessment in Hong Kong

The role played by assessment in English language curriculum in Hong Kong is significant. Assessment is being viewed as 'the integral part of the learning and teaching cycle rather than a separate stage at the end of teaching' (CDC, 2001, p.80). The definitions of formative assessment always highlight the use of formative assessment in collecting evidence of student learning to inform teaching and learning (CDC, 2004; Clarke, 2001; Morris, 1993). The use of feedback is also highlighted as it is the key element that differentiates formative assessment from other forms of assessment (Decoff, 2008). Gipps (1994) suggested that feedback is strongly connected with formative assessment as feedback from teacher to student or student to student acts as a foundation for student to improve upon their work in future. As suggested by the CDC (2004), formative assessment is a type of assessment that 'helps teachers 'to gain insights into learners' strengths and weaknesses, provides feedback to learners about their performance and indicates how to make further progress in their learning' (p.6). This echoes the definition given by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) on assessment for learning (AfL) in 2002: AfL is 'the process

of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there' (p.2).

In fact, to Weeden et al. (2002), AfL is equated to formative assessment and is regarded as a process in which 'teachers seek to identify and diagnose student learning problems and provide quality feedback to students on how to improve their work' (Education Commission, 2000, p.1). In the past, formative assessment did not receive much attention as Hong Kong's education system relied heavily on summative assessment such as highly selective examinations for selecting elites at different levels of learning (Chan et al., 2006; Fok et al., 2006). This examination-dominated culture had caused negative impacts on the education system of Hong Kong. Chan et al. (2006) believed that this culture had made the schooling of Hong Kong inclined to examinations. Biggs (1998) also commented that the heavy reliance on summative assessment such as high-stake examinations has made the final results of students' work rather than students' learning process to be the focus of teaching and learning. This implies that the focus of testing and assessment is on grading and measuring elements rather than on learning. This contrasts sharply with the argument of Black et al. (2003) that any assessment should put the purpose of promoting student learning as its first priority. To strike a balance between formative assessment and summative assessment, the 'Learning to learn' reform (CDC, 2001) in 2001 has paved the way for change in assessment in the education system of Hong Kong (Figure 1). One of the aims of the reform was to encourage the use of formative assessment in schools in order to improve students' learning skills and to promote their life-long learning abilities (CDC, 2001). Carless (2001) agreed that a greater emphasis on formative assessment 'brings some balance to assessment processes that might otherwise be focused almost exclusively on grading and competition' and 'enables a focus on learning and improvement to counter the dominance of testing' (p.3). With a shift from the focus on summative assessment to formative learning, there is a tendency for various assessment tools such as English dictation to be used formative as a mean to improve teachers' teaching and students' learning.

Before 2001

- Assessment of learning
- To assess how well students have mastered their subject content knowledge and skills
- To grade the students against the standards they have attained
- No / limited teachers' feedback given
- Test and examination oriented
- Emphasize summative assessment
- Transmission of knowledge and drilling are common classroom activities
- Emphasize the learning product

After 2001

- Assessment for learning
- To assess students' generic skills, especially those higher-ordered generic/thinking skills identified as the learning goals of the reform
- Teacher gives constructive feedbacks to enhance students' learning
- Students are aware of their learning objectives and pick up teachers' feedbacks for continuous learning
- Formative assessment and summative assessment are used
- Process and product are stressed

Figure 1: A comparison of Hong Kong's assessment reform policy before 2001 and after 2001 (Chan et al., 2006)

2.3 English dictation as an assessment tool in Hong Kong

A search through academic literature found very little mentions of the use of English dictation as assessment tool in Hong Kong. Most of the related literature solely mentions dictation either as a teaching tool or testing tool, but seldom comment on how dictation can be an assessment tool. In the book 'Using Dictation to Develop Pupil's Listening and Writing Skills' published by the Curriculum Develop Institute of Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) (2011), it suggests that English dictation can promote AfL as dictation is regarded as 'a useful tool that helps teachers understand pupils' learning progress and facilitate assessment for learning' (p.11). Teachers in Hong Kong schools are encouraged to 'provide constructive feedback to pupils by analyzing their problems and giving suggestions for improvement' after each dictation (EDB, 2011, p.11). This implies that English dictation is recommended to be use formatively in Hong Kong schools.

However, instead of being used formatively to inform teachers' teaching and students' learning, English dictation has a long history of being a testing device in Hong Kong. Chiang (2002) suggested that the traditional practice of employing 'seen' dictation regularly has made English dictation a testing device rather than a teaching and learning device. She commented that dictation has become a rote memory exercise when teachers select familiar passages from students' textbooks and carry out English dictation for the purpose of checking students' spelling ability of vocabulary items they learnt, as if it is an end to a learning target (Chiang, 2002). Lynd (2001) also shared a similar view as she described English dictation in Hong Kong schools as 'test-type' dictation (p.2). With dictation is primarily employed for the purposes of testing students' English abilities, Watkins et al. (2001) suggested that this can lead to a backwash effect on students' learning strategies as students resort to memorization strategy in tackling dictation. According to Lynd (2001), Chinese students have grown accustomed to the use of memorization in tackling dictation and they tend to recite the content even when they are not required to.

In fact, the CDC (2004) has realized the problem of using English dictation for testing purposes and tried to encourage schools to adopt a more formative approach in using English dictation. In the English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – 6), dictation is recommended to be used as a meaningful learning activity for students to 'apply their phonic skills, practice the integrative use of listening and writing skills and demonstrate their grammar knowledge' rather than a testing device (CDC, 2004, p.174). The CDC (2004) recommended that students should be taught how to employ different skills through drawing their attention to the letter-sound relationships, guiding them to divide words in small chunks and the meaning of the words learnt rather than using rote memorization (p.175).

3. Methodology

With the relative absence of research studies on the formative use of English dictations in Hong Kong, this study aims at gaining some insights into the use of English dictation as formative assessment by primary school teachers in Hong Kong. It is conducted in the light of informing the 2 research questions raised: 1) What are the perceptions of Hong Kong primary English teachers about using English dictations as formative assessment? 2) What are the challenges “using English dictation as formative assessment” present to Hong Kong primary English teachers and why?

To inform the questions raised, a local government primary school using Chinese as the medium of instruction in which English dictation was used as an assessment tool was chosen as a case study. This case study used questionnaire, semi-structured one-on-one interview and focus group interview for data collection. The questionnaire aimed at providing a general overview concerning the issues of using English dictation formatively by collecting quantitative data such as the type of English dictation used at school and the strategies English teachers apply to make dictation formative. The interview was a follow-up to the questionnaire, aiming at collecting qualitative data such as the attitudes and thoughts of English teachers about the formative use of English dictation in greater depth. To raise the confidence of the findings, teachers' views needed to be compared with those of students. Thus, the focus group interview was administrated to students in order to explore their perceptions about how English dictation as an assessment tool could help improve their performance in English dictation. During the analysis, teachers' views were compared with students' views to check if the two correlate and what similarities or differences there may be in these perceptions.

3.1 Research design

Quantitative and qualitative research

This study considered both quantitative data and qualitative data as being the appropriate sources of evidence in the investigation of subjective phenomenon such as

teachers' perceptions. Quantitative data such as factual information concerning the types of English dictation used at the school, the strategies teachers used to conduct English dictation formatively was collected through questionnaire. On the other hand, Qualitative data such as information about the teachers' values and attitudes towards the formative use of English dictations was obtained from interviews. Since human mindset is dynamic, complex and context dependent in nature, it is difficult to explore their hidden complicated world through quantitative data. As Wood (2000) suggested, qualitative research approach is the most common and effective way for illuminating and exploring teachers' understandings and thinking. Qualitative research is suitable for exploring in detail the reasons behind why an individual acts in a particular way. It also gives the 'intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:19).

Triangulation

Multiple methods of data collection were used to cross-check data so that data collected by different means and from different sources could be compared and contrasted to produce a full and balanced study. This involved triangulation, which was defined by Bryman (2004) as 'the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings' (p.1422). By gathering data through different means and from different sources, this can reduce the risk of systematic biases or limitations of a specific method and also give higher degree of validity and generality of explanations developed from the research study. In other words, multiple sources and methods make the conclusion with greater credibility (Maxwell, 2005). In this case study, the teachers' and students' perceptions about the formative use English dictation were compared and checked to ensure provision of accurate information.

3.2 Participants and sampling

The school

The school studied in this study was a convenient sample where the researcher worked as a student-teacher there. It is a co-educational government primary school with Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI). The school is considered to be a young school in its district as it has only 22 years of history. English dictation is used for assessment purposes in all primary levels from Primary 1 to Primary 6 at the school (Appendix D, Q10).

The teachers

All 10 English teachers at the school, except for the researcher herself, were invited to participate in the research. Half of them agreed to fill in the questionnaire in the first phase and do a one-on-one interview with the researcher in the second phase if necessary. They are all Chinese-speaking teachers who teach English at the school studied (Appendix D, Q1) and each of them teaches at least 2 primary levels English (Appendix D, Q2). Among the 5 teachers who agreed to complete the questionnaire, 2 of them were interviewed by the researcher personally on a one-on-one basis. This could allow the researcher to obtain information about teachers' subjective feelings towards the use of English dictation as formative assessment in greater depth.

The students

A total number of 6 student participants were chosen from the Primary 3 and Primary 4 classes that were taught by the researcher. 3 student participants from the Primary 3 and Primary 4 class were selected through randomization respectively. Since both classes have 26 students, students whose class number is 7, 14 or 21 in both classes were invited to participate in a focus group interview hosted by the researcher. All students agreed to participate in the focus group interview. All students have been studying in the same school since Primary 1 and they all have experience in doing English dictation.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Questionnaire

Questionnaires (Appendix A) were administered to all 10 English teachers at the school in order to provide a general overview of the issue concerning the use of

English dictation as formative assessment efficiently. All the teacher participants were given the questionnaires with their names on them to facilitate any follow up questions to be raised in the interview. The questions in the questionnaire were closed-ended, in order to make answers easier to code, analyzed and compared. The questions asking teachers the type of English dictation they used, the way they conducted the English dictation, the extent to which they perceived the English dictation as formative and the formative strategies they implemented, and lastly the challenges they faced in using English dictation formatively. 5 questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher. All the qualitative data from the open-ended questions were recorded under their corresponding questions. Quantitative data were presented in forms of descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentage.

Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was administrated to 2 teacher participants, who had previously completed the questionnaire, to collect data that explored English teachers' attitudes and thoughts towards the formative use of English dictations in greater depth, conferring a personal dimension to the general responses obtained from the questionnaire. The questions (Appendix B) asked were partially developed based on the answers given by the 2 teacher participants in the questionnaire. The questions also asked teachers about their views and attitudes on the formative use of English dictation at school. Being semi-structured, it allowed immediate clarification over ambiguous answers through utilizing clarifying questions, while not losing its focus. Each teacher participant was being interviewed for approximately 15 minutes at school in a comfortable environment with the only existence of the researcher. Due to the school policy on privacy protection, no audio-recording was allowed during the interview so hand-written notes were jotted by the researcher to record the key points made by the interviewee. All the interview data were summarized and organized for data analysis.

Focus group interview

The focus group interview aimed to explore students' attitudes towards the formative use of dictation in improving their performance in future English dictation. A total number of 6 student participants joined the 20-minute focus group interview hosted by the researcher at school with 3 students from Primary 3 and 3 students from

Primary 4. In order to reduce the stress of students arising from giving responses in English, Cantonese was used in conducting the focus interview. Questions (Appendix C) were raised by the researcher in Cantonese for students to discuss and students discussed and voiced their opinions in Cantonese. Their responses would then be translated by the researcher into English for data analysis. The questions included both close-ended and open-ended questions. The former ones were descriptive questions focusing on the forms of English dictation students experience at school, the types of teacher feedback they got in their English dictation and how they made use of the feedback given to improve their dictation performance. The latter ones aimed at exploring students' attitudes towards the usefulness and limitations of English dictation in helping them improve learning. The students' responses were used to compare against the teachers' responses in order to ensure the confidence of the findings. By getting students' responses, this allowed an in-depth analysis of the research questions from the perspective of students, which helped to check and establish validity. Since the school has a strict policy on protecting the privacy of the students, no audio-recording was allowed during the focus group interview so hand-written notes were jotted by the researcher to record the key points made by the interviewees. All the interview data were translated, summarized and organized for data analysis.

3.4 Ethnical consideration

Since this case study involved the participation of human subjects, privacy of the human subjects was the researcher's greatest concern. The permissions from the school principal, teacher participants and student participants were sought in advanced. A briefing was given by the research to the participants explaining to them the nature of the research, the procedures of the data collection methods they were invited to join and how the collected data would be kept safely by the researcher during the data analysis process and destroy after the research finished. All participants had read and signed the letter of consent before involving in any of the data collection methods. The identities of all participants were kept confidential in this research report and they were identified only by labels instead of their real names.

4. Findings

This session reports the results collected from different instruments in the case study. The results are presented in three further parts, according to the data collection method used. The first part describes the results of the questionnaire completed by the teacher participants, followed by the second part giving a report on the teachers' responses in the semi-structured interviews. Finally, the students' responses obtained from the focus group interview are outlined in the third part.

4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaires were distributed to 10 English teachers of the researcher's TP school. The response rate was 50 percent as 5 questionnaires were returned and collected by the researcher before the end of the research period. In this part, most of the quantitative data are transformed into statistics for analysis and are presented in tables.

In section A of the questionnaire, the teacher participants were asked some questions about their background. Of the 5 teachers who completed the questionnaires, all of them work as English subject teachers (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 – The subject teacher participant teaches at school

Q.1 Do you teach English as a subject at your school?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

Concerning the primary levels teach by the participants, 4 teachers reported teaching at least 2 primary levels English (Table 4.2) at the school they work, with only 1 teacher reported teaching 3 levels English. The levels include all levels from Primary 1 to Primary 6.

Table 4.2 – The current primary level(s) teacher teaches English at school

Q.2 Current primary level(s) at present you teach English in your school. (tick all that apply)	Number of responses
P1	1 (20%)
P2	1 (20%)
P3	3 (60%)

P4	2 (40%)
P5	2 (40%)
P6	2 (40%)

Section B of the questionnaire asked the teacher participants questions about the details of English dictation used at their school. All 5 teachers agreed that English dictation is used as a part of the school's English programme (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 – English dictation as a part of English programme

Q.3 Is English dictation used as part of the English programme in your school?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

When they were asked the primary levels in which English dictation is used, they all chose 'all forms' as the answer (Table 4.4), agreeing that English dictation is implemented in all levels from Primary 1 to Primary 6.

Table 4.4 – The primary level(s) in which English dictation is used

Q.4 Which primary level(s) is English dictations used with in your school?	Number of response
P1 - 3	0 (0%)
P4 - 6	0 (0%)
All forms	5 (100%)
Other (please specify)	0 (0%)

For the question asking the participants whether the English dictation is included as part of the regular scheme of work in the forms where it is used, all 5 participants answered 'yes'. All the teachers also described the frequency of doing English dictation with their class as 'once every unit'. The responses are summarized in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 – English dictation as part of the regular scheme of work and its frequency

Q.5 In the primary level(s) where it is used, is it part of the regular scheme of work?	Number of response
Yes	5 (100%)
No	0 (0%)
Not sure	0 (0%)
If YES, how often do you do English dictation with your students?	Number of response

Once every unit	5 (100%)
Once every 2 units	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0 (0%)

The rest of Section B continued to explore more details about the type of English dictation used and the sources of text used in the dictation. 100 percent of the teacher participants reported that they do seen dictation with the students once every unit. Meanwhile, none of the teachers reported doing any ‘unseen dictation’, ‘memorized dictation’ or ‘free dictation’ with their students. The statistics are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 – Type(s) of English dictation used

Q.6 What type(s) of English dictation do you do with your students and how often do you do it? (tick all that apply)	Number of response	Frequency
Seen dictation	5 (100%)	Once every unit (100%)
Unseen dictation	0 (0%)	-
Memorized dictation	0 (0%)	-
Free dictation	0 (0%)	-

Then the participants were asked about the text type constituted in the English dictation. Table 4.7 shows that all teachers reported the use of ‘texts composed of a number of related sentences’ in English dictation. The statistics are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 – Text type of the English dictation

Q.7 In your school, which of the following are used as English dictation? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
List of single words	3 (60%)
Single, unconnected sentences	0 (0%)
Texts composed of a number of related sentences	5 (100%)
Other (please specify): Verb forms such as past tense and present tense	2 (40%)

Participants were also asked to identify the source of text used for English dictation, selecting from 3 possible options, with the opportunity to add others not named in the questionnaire. They were asked the sources of text for the dictation, to which 5 participants answered ‘textbook’, 3 answered ‘coursebook other than the

textbook', 2 answered the teacher-designed vocabulary book and none answered 'passages made up by the teacher' (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 – The sources of text used in English dictation

Q.8 What are the sources for texts used in English dictations in your school? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
Textbook	5 (100%)
Passages made up by teachers	0 (0%)
Other coursebook other than the textbook	3 (60%)
Other (please specify):	
The vocabulary book designed by the subject teachers	2 (40%)
Verbs extracted from the verb table in the textbook	1 (20%)

The last part of Section B asked the teachers about the consistency of the English dictation used in different classes (Table 4.9). When they were asked whether all classes in a form do the exactly the same dictation, 4 answered sometimes while 1 answered all the time. Then the participants needed to respond to the question whether the classes do dictations from the same passage by not necessary identical ones. For this question, 4 participants answered all the time with 1 answered sometimes. The last question needed teachers to describe whether the classes do different dictations selected by their own English teachers. 4 participants reported sometimes with 1 answered all the time.

Table 4.9 – Consistency of English dictation

Q.9 Do all the classes in a form:	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
Do the exactly the same dictation?	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	0 (0%)
Do dictations from the same passage, but not necessary identical ones?	4 (80%)	1(20%)	0 (0%)
Do different dictations selected by their own English teachers	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify):	-	-	-

Section C of the questionnaire focused on investigating how formative is the English dictation used as an assessment tool at the participants' school. Participants were initially asked whether English dictation is used for assessment purposes in their school. The statistics are presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 – English dictation as an assessment tool

Q.10 Is English dictation used for assessment purposes in your school? That is, do the students' dictation marks form part of their term marks?	Yes		No	
		5 (100%)		0 (0%)
If yes, in form: P1 – 6	5 (100%)		0 (0%)	
If yes, what percentage of the marks does dictation make up? 10 percent (20 marks out of 200 marks)	5 (100%)		0 (0%)	

Knowing the context of English dictation is another way to see if it was used as an assessment tool. Participants were asked the context in which English dictation is used at their school. All teachers reported that English dictation is used as both classroom tests and as part of the examination. Table 4.11 summarized their responses in the following.

Table 4.11 – The context of English dictation

Q.11 Are English dictation given as:	Number of response
As classroom test only	0 (0%)
As an examination instrument only (that is, given to a whole form as one of their end-of-term examination)	0 (0%)
Both as classroom tests and as part of the examination	5 (100%)

To see if the English dictation is being used formatively by the teachers, it was important to understand how teachers prepare their students for the dictation. All 5 teachers reported that they did prepare students for the dictation. In terms of the preparation they did with the students, the most frequently used preparation was penmanship, with all 5 participants reported using that all the time to prepare students for English dictation. 4 answered having in-class revision prior to dictation all the time while one 1 answered having that sometimes. Only 1 participant reported revisiting common mistakes students made in their dictation as an all-time preparation method while 2 answered doing that sometimes and 1 reported doing it rarely or even never attempting it.

Table 4.12 – How students are prepared for English dictation

Q.12 Is there anything you do to prepare students for the English dictation?	Yes		No	
		5 (100%)		0 (0%)
If yes, in which of the following ways?	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never	

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In-class revision before having the dictation	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)
Penmanship (ask students to copy the dictation passage / words)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Remind students some possible mistakes they may make in their dictation	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
Other (please specify):	-	-	-

To gain a more holistic view of the use of dictation as an assessment tool, the participants were asked about the marking of English dictation. All 5 teachers chose 'English teachers to be the only marker of the dictation' all the time while they answered 'rarely or never' for the other 2 options given (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13 – Marking of the English dictation

Q.13 Who marks the English dictation?	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
English teachers mark the dictations for their class	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Students mark their own dictations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Students mark each other's dictations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Other (please specify):	-	-	-

Besides understanding who marked the English dictation, it was also important to know the teachers' belief in the aspects of students' English abilities that English dictation helped assess. All 5 teachers believed that various aspects of students' English ability could be assessed through dictation, especially the abilities in memorization, spelling and listening as well as students' vocabulary bank. 1 teacher also mentioned that English dictation could assess the dictation strategies students employed in tackling dictation. The teachers' responses are summarized in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 – Marking of the English dictation

Q.14 I think English dictation can help me assess my students' ... (tick all that apply)	Yes	No	Not sure
Ability to memorize correctly the words / sentences of the dictation content	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Ability to spell a word correctly by listening to its pronunciation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Ability to use punctuation correctly	4 (80%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)
Knowledge about English grammar	3 (60%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)
Vocabulary bank	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Listening ability	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify): The ability to apply certain dictation strategies such as	1 (20%)	-	-

guessing uncertain words from the context of the text rather than just guess from its pronunciation			
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Participants were then asked if the English dictation was followed up and in what ways was it followed up. All participants answered yes in the former question. For the ways they followed up the dictation, English dictation is primarily followed up by students' doing corrections and students informing their parents about their dictation results. 3 participants also reported reviewing students' errors as a basis for their teaching while 2 participants reported revisiting students' mistakes explicitly in class. There were also other ways not named in the questionnaire suggested by the participants, including re-dictation for students who failed, explicit teaching of dictation skills and copying the whole dictation content. The information is presented in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15 – The ways in which English dictation is followed up

Q.15 Is the English dictation followed up?	Yes		No
	5 (100%)		0 (0%)
If yes, in which of the following ways? (tick all that apply)	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
Student do corrections and which are checked by the teacher	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Students take home their dictations for their parents to see with parent's signature required as proof	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Teachers review errors and use them as a basis for further teaching	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)
Teacher revisits the common mistakes students made with the class	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	0 (0%)
Remediation for students with low marks	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	3 (80%)
Other (please specify):			
Re-dictation for students who fail	1 (20%)	-	-
Teach students some skills to avoid making some careless mistakes	1 (20%)	-	-
Students who fail need to copy the whole dictation content to strengthen memorization	1 (20%)	-	-

Apart from the ways English dictation is followed up, participants needed to identify the feedback concerning to English dictation they provide to students as teacher feedback plays an crucial role in making an assessment formative. All participants answered that teacher feedback would be provided to their students after doing or marking the dictations. Table 4.16a illustrates that marks are given by teachers to students as a primary form of teacher feedback. Meanwhile, 3 participants reported to give verbal feedback and 2 reported to provide students with written feedback such as encouraging phrases. Then the participants needed to identify the

reasons why they provided students with their choices of teacher feedback. The question was open-ended in nature so participants gave various responses. Table 4.16b summarizes their reasons.

Table 4.16a – Teacher feedback on English dictation

Q.16 Do you provide feedback in any form to students after doing the English dictations or after marking their English dictations?	Yes	No
		5 (100%)
If yes, what kind of feedback do you provide to them? (tick all that apply)	Yes	No
Marks (e.g. The total is 100 marks)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
Grades	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Written feedback	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
If yes, please specify: Phrases to encourage students such as 'Well done!' 'Good job!'	2 (100%)	-
Verbal feedback	3 (60%)	2 (40%)
If yes, please specify: Teach students how to spell some difficult words using phonics	2 (66%)	-
Draw students attention on the words that are easily misspelt	1 (33%)	-
Other (please specify): A sticker or stamp given to student who gets full marks	3 (60%)	-

Table 4.16b – Reasons for the choice of teacher feedback

Based on your answer in Q16, what are the reasons behind your choice(s) of teacher feedback?
For those who chose 'marks', these were the reasons suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Giving marks is a compulsory according to the school policy - Marks is a simple indicator of how well the student did in the dictation - Make the student's performance in dictation become measurable
For those who chose 'written feedback', this was the reason suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage students to do better in future dictations
For those who chose 'verbal feedback', these were the reasons suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A direct way to draw students' attention on the mistakes they made in the dictation - Can teach students the skills for tackling dictation explicitly
For those who chose 'other', this was the reason suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage students to do better in future dictations

To gain a general view on teachers' personal belief in how they saw the usefulness of English dictation, Question 17 in Section C asked participants to agree or disagree to 9 statements related to the usefulness of English dictation. Tables 4.17a and 4.17b looks at teachers' opinions regarding English dictation. 100 percent of the teachers agreed to Statement 1, 2, 3 and 5 while 60 percent or over agreed to Statement 4, 5 and 6. Only 40 percent of the teachers agreed to Statement 8 and 9.

While for statement 10, all teachers believed that dictation helps them to motivate their students to study English.

Table 4.17 - Teachers' opinions on English dictation

I think English dictation helps me to...	Agree	Disagree
1. Understand more about my students' strengths in doing dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
2. Understand more about my students' weaknesses in doing dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
3. Notice the common mistakes made by students in dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
4. Notice the difficulties students faced in doing dictation	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
5. Keep track of the learning progress of my students	2 (60%)	3 (60%)
6. Brainstorm follow-up activities, tasks or exercises to help students tackle dictations	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
7. Provide constructive feedback to my students in order to help them improve performance in doing dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
8. Raise my awareness on what I can do to maximize students' gains in doing dictations	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
9. Improve my teaching according to students' performance in dictation	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
10. Push my students to study English	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

In order to explore how teachers defined formative assessment in their own understanding, they were asked to identify the characteristics of formative assessment. Table 4.18 shows that 100 percent of all participants ticked all options provided on the questionnaire while 40 percent of the participants additionally commented that the focus of formative assessment is on the learning process rather than results.

Table 4.18 - Teachers' opinions on the characteristics of formative assessment

Q.18 In your own understanding, what are the characteristics of formative assessment? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
Consistent and on-going throughout the learning process	5 (100%)
Provides feedback to teachers to inform and improve their own teaching	5 (100%)
Provides feedback to students to inform and improve their own learning	5 (100%)
Used to check students' learning progress so that adjustments can be made by students to reach learning goals	5 (100%)
Other (please specify): The focus is on the learning process but not the results	2 (40%)

In Question 19, participants were asked to identify the extent to which they believed the English dictation they did with the students was formative assessment. 3 participants answered to a small extent while 2 answered to a large extent in this question (Table 4.19).

Table 4.19 - Teachers' opinions on how formative is the English dictation used

Q.19 To what extent do you think the English dictation you do are used formatively to assess students' English proficiency?	Number of response
To the full extent	0 (0%)
To the large extent	2 (40%)
Neutral	0 (0%)
To a small extent	3 (60%)
To zero extent	0 (0%)

More questions were asked to investigate teachers' belief in the formative use of English dictation. Question 20 asked about how teachers make use of the information obtained from students' English dictation to adjust their teaching. All teachers reported making use of the information and suggested different ways of utilizing the information to inform teaching (Table 4.20).

Table 4.20 - Teachers' opinions on how they make use of English dictation to inform teaching

Q.20 Do you make use of the information obtained from students' English dictation to adjust your teaching?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

When participants were asked if they thought using English dictation formatively is difficult, 2 answered yes while 3 answered no (Table 4.21).

Table 4.21 – Teachers' opinions on the difficulties in using English dictation as a formative assessment

Q.21 Do you think it is difficult to use English dictation formatively to assess students' English proficiency?	Yes	No
	2 (80%)	3 (40%)

Then participants also needed to identify some challenges that were presented to them when using English dictation formatively. 100 percent of teachers chose 'takes a lot of time to provide constructive feedback to students individually' and 80 percent chose 'hard to keep track of the learning progress of every student' and 'workload is heavy for teacher' in this question. The responses are summarized in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22 – Teachers’ opinions on the challenges of using English dictation as a formative assessment

Q.22 In your view, what is /are the challenge(s) ‘using English dictation formatively’ presented to you as an English teacher? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
Takes a lot of time to provide constructive feedback to students individually	5(100%)
Workload is heavy for the teacher	4 (80%)
Hard to keep track of the learning progress of every student	4 (80%)
There is only little or no value to use English dictations formatively	0 (%)
Other (please specify):	-

The last question of the questionnaire aimed to explore teachers’ preference for the formative use of English dictations. All 5 teachers answered yes as they prefer using English dictation as a formative assessment (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23 – Teachers’ preference for using English dictation formatively

Q.23 Would you prefer English dictation to be used formatively as an assessment tool?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

4.2 Interviews with teachers

To investigate teachers’ perceptions about the use of English dictation as formative assessment in greater depth, interviews were used as a means for collecting data. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing interviewees to give open-ended responses within a number of controlled questions. The interviewer could therefore obtain greater flexibility in developing further questions during the interviews to look for specific information concerning teachers’ perceptions. Moreover, interviews provided interviewer the opportunity to interact face to face with the interviewees, which enabled immediate clarification of any unknown and ambiguous ideas in the questionnaires or interviews.

2 out of the 5 teacher participants who did the questionnaire were invited to do a one-on-one interview with the researcher. They were labeled as Teacher A and Teacher B in this report in order to keep their real identities confidential. They were both selected to be interviewees because their perceptions about the use of English dictation as formative assessment were quite different from each other. For instance, in the questionnaire, Teacher B reported using English dictation formatively as difficult whereas Teacher A found it manageable. Their years of experience are quite

different from each other because Teacher A has only taught at the school studied for 1.5 years while Teacher B is a senior English teacher teaching English for more than 10 years there. Since no audio-recording was allowed by the school, hand-written notes made during the interviews were summarized (Appendix E). Relevant quotes and comments were used in the discussion part of this research report.

4.3 Focus group interview with students

To check if there was any discrepancy exists between teachers' and students' perceptions about the use of English dictation as formative assessment, focus group interview was used as a research tool as well as a checking mechanism in this research to triangulate the data collected from alternative sources such as the questionnaires and interviews. Both close-ended and open-ended questions were raised in the focus group interview to explore students' views and attitudes towards the usefulness and limitations of English dictation as an assessment tool.

6 students, including 3 Primary 3 students and 3 Primary 4 students, were randomly selected from the 2 classes that the researcher taught and invited to join the focus group interview hosted by the researcher. They were labeled as Student A, B, C, D, E and F in this report in order to keep their real identities confidential. The focus group interview was conducted in the mother tongue of the students. Since no audio-recording was allowed by the school, hand-written notes made during the interview were summarized and translated back into English (Appendix F). Relevant quotes and comments were used in the discussion part of this research report.

5. Discussion

This session aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the data concerning teachers' perception about the use of English dictation as formative assessment collected from the questionnaires and the one-on-one interviews. The data of students' perception about English dictation collected from the focus group interview was also being analyzed and compared to see if there is any discrepancy between the thoughts of the teachers and the students, adding more depth to the study. To inform the 2 research questions raised, this session began with analyzing the teachers' perception based on their responses in the questionnaires and the interviews, followed by an analysis of the students' responses in the focus group interview and finally ended with a comparison between the perceptions of the two parties.

5.1 Teachers' perception about the use of English dictation

The teachers' responses in Section A of the questionnaire (Appendix D, Table 4.1 - 4.2) indicated that all 5 participants are qualified English teachers at the school studied and have experiences in teaching at least 2 primary levels English, ranging from Primary 1 to Primary 6. Their experiences in teaching different levels is a valuable resource contributing to this study as their perceptions about the use of English dictation as formative assessment could be influenced by their personal experiences of handling different levels of students.

The responses from teachers in Section B (Appendix D, Table 4.4 - 4.9) of the questionnaire helped to provide a general overview of some facts concerning the English dictation used at the school studied. The data indicated that English dictation is included as part of the English programme as well as the regular scheme of work for all primary levels at the school (Appendix D, Table 4.3 – 4.5). This showed that English dictation plays a rather important role in the English Curriculum of the school. Concerning the type of English dictation used, seen dictation seems to be the only option while the choice of text type depends a lot on the teachers (Appendix D, Table 4.6). 'Texts composed of a number of related sentences' was selected by all 5 teachers to be the most common choice of text type. Other choices including 'list of single words' and 'verb forms' were also selected by some teachers. This revealed that

dictation is being used as a spelling exercise or test with isolated words being considered by some teachers to be a suitable choice of text type. This resembles the findings of Lynd's study (2001) as over 50 percent of the respondents considered the use of single words as the definition of dictation. Meanwhile, the responses showed that English dictation is used regularly 'once every unit' and the text or vocabulary items used are primarily drawn from students' textbook (Appendix D, Table 4.5 & 4.8). As Chiang (2002) suggested, teachers choosing familiar passages from textbook implies that they treat English dictation as 'an end to a learning target itself or a revision activity'(p.26), which aims at checking students' spelling ability of the previous-learnt vocabulary items regularly. As teachers are free to choose the use of text type in English dictation, it is not surprising to find that the English dictation conducted by teachers is not always consistent (Appendix D, Table 4.9). This could be the result of how teachers try to cater for the English levels of the classes they teach by tailoring the content of the dictation. The above findings showed that although seen dictation is adopted as the only dictation method, the content of the dictation varies a lot depending on the choice of the teachers, and therefore leading to a variation in the consistency of the type of English dictation used at the school studied.

5.2 Teachers' perception about the assessment purposes of English dictation

Section C of the questionnaire mainly focused on investigating teachers' perception on the how formative is the use of English dictation as an assessment tool. From the teachers' responses, English dictation is found to be used for assessment purposes at the school studied as it takes up 10 percent of the total mark of the subject English (Appendix D, Table 4.10) and it is used as 'both a classroom test and part of the examination' (Appendix D, Table 4.11). The proportion of marks that English dictation is accounted for suits the recommendation made by the CDC (2004): 'if dictation is used for assessment purposes, it should not take up more than 10% of the total subject marks' (p.175). Since the marks students get in their English dictation is counted as part of their total subject mark which would be shown on their report cards, the English dictation at the school studied contains elements of summative assessment. The marks act as a description of students' learning performance given for the purpose

of reporting to different stakeholders of the education systems such as teachers, learners and parents (Black et al., 1998; Carless, 2011). Although dictation is a compulsory practice at school, teachers believed that it can values assess various aspects of students' English performance. All 5 teachers held the belief that English dictation can assess students' memorization, spelling ability, vocabulary bank and listening ability (Appendix D, Table 4.14). This implies that teachers believed the English dictation they do with the students is an effective means of assessment informing them information about their students' English abilities, echoing Lynd's (2001) findings as 74 percent of the local teachers recognized the effectiveness of seen dictation in assessing students' English abilities. Meanwhile, those teachers are the only markers of the English dictation (Appendix D, Table 4.13). Knowing who marks the dictation is crucial because this is related to the issues of who follows up the dictation and how it is done. If dictation is used formatively to inform teaching and learning, teachers marking the English dictation alone could therefore be explained as using the dictation as a basis of further teaching. Nevertheless, the fact that teachers being the only markers indicated that they have the intention to reinforce the use of dictation 'as a test rather than a way to help students learn' (Lynd, 2002, p.55). This would be explained in further detail in the following sessions.

5.3 Teachers' perception about the preparation prior to English dictation

The ways how teachers prepare their students for English dictation were also investigated in Section C of the questionnaire as the preparation done by the teachers with their students reflect what learning objectives they expect students to achieve in doing English dictation. The teachers' responses suggested that penmanship is the most commonly used practice to prepare students for the English while in-class revision is the second popular choice among the teachers (Appendix D, Table 4.12). In the one-on-one interviews, Teacher A and B both recognized the usefulness of penmanship in finding out the possible spelling mistakes that students may make in their dictation and Teacher A even mentioned that doing penmanship helps strengthen students' memorization of the dictation content (Appendix E, Q1.3). This implies that the teachers treat dictation as a non-communicative technique that emphasizes on the

importance of memorization, as suggested by Carless (1999), who claimed that 'dictation is 'the memorization and copying of texts being seen as a mental discipline and the precursor to deeper understanding' (p.244-245). The use of penmanship and using in-class revisions to reinforce students' spelling therefore suggested that dictation is primarily conducted for the purposes of checking students' spelling of the vocabulary and how well students can memorize the dictation content. In this sense, dictation is being treated as a testing device rather than a formative assessment tool used to promote student learning. Similarly, when students were asked how they prepare for dictation, almost everyone mentioned the use of recitation and memorization as their study strategies and school is the place where they learnt the strategies from (Appendix F, Q1 & Q2). Both teachers and students showed a clear preference in using recitation and memorization as a way to prepare for the dictation. Even though 4 teachers admitted to do in-class revision with the students all the time before having the English dictation, the main focus of the revision is still on reinforcing students' memory of spelling of vocabulary. In the interviews, both Teacher A and B would ask students to spell words from the dictation content to check if there is any mistake (Appendix E, Q1.3). For these teachers, reinforcing students' memorization of the dictation content and checking their spelling seems to be the first priority and the only purpose of doing preparation. From this, it seems that teachers emphasizes a lot on spelling, neglecting many other aspects of English abilities that can be assessed by English dictation, contradicting to what they thought can be assessed by English dictation. In fact, memorization should not be the only way to prepare students for the dictation. Concerning this point, the CDC (2004) clearly stated that asking learners to 'memorize large chunks of texts or long lists of words as homework to prepare for dictation' is not a good practice (p.175). From the ways to prepare for English dictation reported by teachers and students respectively, this reflects both teachers and students seeing dictation as a means to test memorization rather than a teaching tool for promoting various aspects of students' English ability, even though they see values of doing dictation due to the students' English abilities it helps to assess. This could be explained by what Lynd (2001) suggested: 'memorization is used in seen dictation and has a traditional role in Confucian heritage cultures such as Hong Kong's' (p.61). Teachers and students might have grown accustomed to the use of memorization as a study strategy, influencing them to generalize the use of memorization in tackling English dictation.

5.4 Teachers' perception about the follow-up to English dictation

Besides how teachers prepare their students for English dictation, the ways how teachers follow up the English dictation, which means how teachers make use of the information about students' English abilities obtained from the English dictation, is also crucial. It is because this reflects whether the dictation is used as a testing tool or a teaching tool, which impacts significantly on what students can learn from doing English dictation. The data collected suggested that doing corrections and informing the parents about the dictation results were chosen by all 5 teachers as a follow-up to English dictation (Appendix D, Table 4.15). Re-dictation and asking students who fail to copy the dictation content were also suggested as a follow-up by a teacher. Both Teacher A and B also mentioned the purpose of doing corrections or re-dictation is to strengthen students' memorization of the dictation text and to raise their awareness on avoiding to make the same mistakes again (Appendix E, Q1.3). Again, not only the preparation focuses on reinforcing spelling and memorization of the text, the follow-up also focuses on the same areas, echoing Chiang's (2002) comment on dictation being 'basically a textbook based rote memory exercise'(p.16). The English dictation is therefore to a large extent a testing device because teachers do not follow-up students' dictation in a way to maximize students' learning; instead, the follow-ups solely focus on reinforcing students' spelling and memorization of the text while other areas are being neglected. However, there are also attempts made by the teachers to do follow-up teaching in order to help students tackle dictation strategically. For instance, revisiting the common mistakes students made and reviewing students' errors as a basis for further teaching were reported to be used all teachers sometimes or all the time (Appendix D, Table 4.15). This shows that the teachers have tried to use the information about students' English abilities obtained from dictation to inform and refine their own teaching as a way to help students improve. Teachers' attempts has made dictation less summative because the main purpose of doing formative assessment is to promote student learning through identifying how learners' performance can be improved based on the evidence students' accomplishment gathered and utilizing the evidence to make decisions about the next steps in teachers' instructions (Black et al., 1998; Black et al, 2003; Weeden et al., 2002). However, these attempts are not sufficient to make English dictation an effective formative assessment if teachers continue to provide feedback focusing only

on improving students spelling and memorization skills to students. This confines students' learning gain and is unable to promote students' learning.

The use of feedback among teachers was also explored in this study because feedback plays a significant role in determining how formative an assessment can be. The statistics showed that all teachers would provide feedback to their students after doing or marking the English dictation and feedback is given mostly in the form of marks (Appendix D, Table 4.16a). One of the reasons why marks is chosen to be feedback is that it makes students' performance become measurable and is an indicator of how well a student perform in English dictation (Appendix D, Table 4.16b). Some teachers also give verbal feedback, written feedback or feedback such as stickers or stamps to students. The two teachers interviewed also mentioned that they have tried to teach students some dictation strategies other than spelling strategies and Teacher A even explained that teaching students those strategies is a 'long-term solution' to help students improve while students cannot rely solely on recitation (Appendix E, Q1.5) The use of verbal feedback such as teaching students how to spell words using phonics and drawing students' attention on words that are easily misspelt indicated that the teachers have adjusted their teaching specifically to cater for the learning needs of the students. This is an example showing how English dictation can be used formatively to teach and help students improve. As suggested by the CDC (2004), dictation has the potential to be a good assessment tool when it is 'used with well-planned teaching strategies rather than just being a testing device' (p.175). The use of phonics to teach spelling was also raised by several students in the interview as a dictation strategy taught by their teachers; however, they seemed reluctant to apply that strategy because they found memorization is a much more direct strategy for tackling dictation (Appendix F, Q4). This could be the result of how teachers' preparation and follow-ups emphasized greatly on training students to use memorization as a strategy to do English dictation and therefore students are used to using it. Only one student mentioned a strategy of guessing missed words by looking at the surrounding text (Appendix F, Q.4, Student D). It seems that what teachers believe they have taught the students through giving verbal feedback does not necessarily be absorbed by the students, meaning that the quality of the verbal feedback might not be in-depth or focus on problem areas enough to improve students learning. Meanwhile, teachers try to express their appreciation of the students' good

work using written feedback such as encouraging phrases or stickers and stamps, showing that the teachers want to motivate the students to do better in the future with the use of some reinforcements (Appendix D, Table 4.16b). As the CDC (2004) puts it, 'not every word found in the learning materials, including the textbooks, must be learnt by heart by the learners' (p.175). Most students also showed appreciation to getting stickers or encouraging phrases from teachers and treat it as a motivation pushing them to work harder next time (Appendix F, Q6). However, the students did make an interesting point about how high marks indicate hard work or diligence while low marks indicate laziness. This indicates that marks can be considered as a blunt instrument that carries labeling effect and promote comparison among students in the eyes of the students. In fact, the use of marks as feedback also suggests that dictation is being used to test students' ability to memorize texts and spellings or their diligence (Lynd, 2001). The types of teacher feedback demonstrated teachers' attempts in providing students constructive and effective feedback for the purpose of helping students to tackle dictation in a more skillful way rather simply recite everything word by word. But in reality, the use of memorization has rooted so deeply in both the minds of teachers and students, which has diminished the effectiveness of the teachers' feedback on promoting students' learning.

5.5 Teachers' perception about using English dictation as formative assessment

To have an all-round picture of the teachers' perception, teachers were asked to define formative assessment and all of the teachers selected all the characteristics named in the questionnaire (Appendix D, Table 4.18), suggesting that they have a similar definition of formative assessment. It seems that all teachers have perceived the essence of formative assessment such as 'on-going', 'providing feedback', 'check students' learning progress' and 'make adjustment to reach learning goals'. Teacher A and B also commented that formative assessment should make the strengths and weaknesses in learning clear to the learner so that the learner can use that information as a basis to achieve higher (Appendix E, Q1.1). The role of feedback in making an assessment formative was particularly being emphasized by both teachers in the interviews (Appendix E, Q1.1 follow-up). This echoes what Sadler (1989) suggested, it is essential to let students reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in their

performance so the positive work can be reinforced and the weak areas can be modified and improved. Some literatures about providing feedback to students also recognized the usefulness of feedback on helping students in the learning process (Black et al., 1998; Gipps, 1994). Teachers' explanation on the role of feedback suggests that teachers have high awareness on the importance of provide constructive feedback to students as a way to promote student learning. Although teachers' awareness could impact on their ways of conducting English dictation formative, their actual practice does not necessarily match their belief as they might be other factors influencing their decisions, which are further explained in the following.

The data collected also suggested that all teachers hold a positive attitude towards the use of English dictation as formative assessment. Firstly, the teachers recognized the values of doing English dictation as they all believed that English dictation help them to understand more about their students' English abilities, provide constructive feedback to students accordingly and raise their awareness on maximizing students' gains in doing dictation (Appendix D, Table 4.17). All teachers also agreed that dictation helps them to motivate their students to study English (Appendix D, Table 4.17). The students' responses matched with the teachers' as some students mentioned that getting high marks in dictation is a reinforcement that pushes them continue to keep up the good work. In contrast, some mentioned that the compulsory nature of dictation and the chance of being punished if fail have left them no choice but to study English. In this sense, dictation is used by the teachers as a 'unique pedagogy' that carries 'a disciplinary function' to push students to study harder (Wong, 2006). However, not many teachers agreed to the statements about English dictation helping them to keep track of learners' progress, brainstorm follow-up activities or improve their teaching with accordance to students' dictation performance (Appendix D, Table 4.17). This suggests that teachers indeed receive much information concerning students' performance in English dictation; however, the teachers are not keen on using that information to design follow-ups or refine their teaching. This could be the result of the challenges they face in using English dictation formatively, which hinder them from putting English dictation as formative assessment in practice.

The data indicated that teachers faced various challenges including not having sufficient time to provide constructive feedback to students individually, heavy workload and the difficulty in keeping track of the learning progress of every student when using English dictation as formative assessment (Appendix D, Table 4.22). It seems that time is a common difficulty faced by teachers who try to employ formative assessment as many U.K. teachers also reported time is a major constraint and challenge in the study by Nesson (2002). Both Teacher A and B also reported time factor as a constraint whereas Teacher A also mentioned that students' common practice of using recitation as strategy to study for dictation as one of the challenges (Appendix E, Q2.1). Yau's (2004) study of teachers' perception about formative assessment revealed also found that teachers' thinking was being framed by those contextual factors such as the learning culture of students, which in turn restrict their implementation of formative assessment. Black et al. (2003) argued that teachers need to make significant changes for a good establishment of formative assessment; similarly, Weeden et al. (2002) believed that teachers need to reconsider and re-evaluate their approach to teaching and learning in order to implement formative assessment effectively. But in reality, it is hard for teachers to achieve all this because of the challenges imposed by different environmental factors such as time constraint and having extra workload from doing formative assessment. With teachers facing these challenges, they all longed for support from the school or other stakeholders of the education system to help them cope with using English dictation as formative assessment (Appendix E, Q2.2). The fact that teachers wanted support from stakeholders reflects that support from stakeholders is not easy to obtain but somehow it is essential as Weeden et al. (2002) believed 'any change... will need support from colleagues, parents and policy makers' (p.29).

6. Conclusion

With limited research studies on the use of English dictation as formative assessment in Hong Kong, the present case study attempted to extend the body of research through investigating both teachers' and students' perceptions about English dictation.

Key issues and recommendations

The findings of this research have in fact provided some insights into how English dictation can be used formatively by teachers to assess students' English abilities in the light of promoting student learning. The teachers' responses from the questionnaires and interviews showed that teachers in general have a good understanding about the characteristics of formative assessment and they seem to hold a rather positive attitude towards the use of English dictation as an assessment tool. Although teachers see the values of doing English dictation and they attempt to provide constructive feedback to students, but still, there is a gap between the teachers' belief and their practice. Although the teachers have made efforts in making English dictation a good teaching and learning tool by teaching spelling strategies or making use of reinforcement to motivate students to study for English dictation, the English dictation does not function effectively as formative assessment. This could be the result of how teachers focus too much on reinforcing students spelling ability and memorization of the dictation content, causing the ways how teachers prepare students for dictation and follow up the dictation to overlook other important abilities that can also be assessed by English dictation. As a result, students' use of memorization as study strategy is reinforced and their gains in doing dictation can hardly be maximized. However, what cannot be neglected is the fact that teachers indeed face various challenges in employing English dictation as formative assessment. This helps different stakeholders including the schools, teachers, parents and the learners themselves within the education system to at least get an idea of the difficulties teachers experienced and what can be done to provide teachers with the suitable support and environment to carry out English dictation as formative assessment effectively as a means to inform teaching and learning. To maximize students' learning gains in doing English dictation, here are some recommendations for teachers on how they can effectively use English dictation to assess students formatively. Black et al. (2003) suggested that the use of formative assessment does

not necessarily increase teachers' workload as they believed in a 'redistribution of effort' (p.2), meaning that teachers should learn to work smarter rather than harder. This idea resembles what Sutton (1995) suggested: assessment and marking should emphasize on assessing certain aspects of students' work rather than everything. Moreover, to make English dictation not just focus on spelling or reciting, there are various to conduct English dictation rather than just seen dictation. The CDC (2004) has recommended schools to use 'theme-based free dictation' (p.177) regularly 'to motivate young learners and promote autonomy in language' (p.176).

Limitations of the study

This study did not investigate any internal and personal factors such as the teachers' characters or personalities, which can also have an influence on the teachers' perception about the use of English dictation as formative assessment. Yau's (2004) study on teachers' perception about formative assessment suggested that innovative teachers who are more open to changes are more willing to adopt formative assessment than conservative teachers. Since this study did not explore this area of teachers' perception, the challenges, which are external factors, faced by teachers in using English dictation formatively as reported in this study could only be partly responsible for influencing teachers' perception.

Another limitation is that this study might be influenced by subject effect and experimenter effect, which might in turn reduce the validity of the findings. Since the students were being taught by the researcher, they might tend to impress the researcher by hiding their true beliefs, feelings or intentions and giving out positive answers in the focus group interview. Similarly, the teachers who completed the questionnaires or being interviewed were colleagues of the researcher. They might also want to make a positive image to the researcher responding positively to the questions. In terms of experimenter effect, the summary notes of the interviews with teachers and students might not be transcribed perfectly in a way that can express the original meaning made by the subjects. Without the use of audio-recording during the interviews, the recording of data by the researcher using hand-written notes might be biased by the researcher as the word choices researcher might influence her

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interpretation of the data. This may also affect reduce the validity of the findings and the study.

(9680 words)

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8. Appendices

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Appendix B – One-on-one interview questions

Appendix C – Focus group interview questions

Appendix D – Tables of questionnaire statistics

Appendix E – Summary of one-on-one interviews with Teacher A & Teacher B

Appendix F – Summary of focus group interview with Students A, B, C, D, E and F

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment
Questionnaire survey

Section A - Background Information

1. Do you teach English as a subject at your school? Yes___ (go to Q2) No___ (Thank you for your participation.)

2. Current form(s) at present you teach English in your school (tick all that apply):

P1___ P2___ P3___ P4___ P5___ P6___

Section B – English dictations at your school

3. Is English dictation used as part of the English programme in your school?

Yes___ No___

4. Which primary level(s) is English dictation used with in your school?

P.1 – 3___ P.4 – 6___ All levels___ Other (please specify): _____

5. In the primary level(s) where it is used, is it part of the regular scheme of work?

Yes___ No___ Not sure___

If YES, how often do you do English dictations with your students?

Once every unit___ Once every 2 unit___ Other (please specify): _____

6. What type(s) of English dictation do you do with your students and how often do you do it? (tick all that apply)

Types	Yes	No	Frequency (e.g. once every unit)
Seen dictation			
Unseen dictation			
Memorized dictation			
Free dictation			
Other (please specify):			

7. In your school, which of the following are used as English dictations? (tick all that apply)

	Yes	No
List of single words		
Single, unconnected sentences		
Texts composed of a number of related sentences		
Other (please specify):		

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

8. What are the sources for texts used in English dictations in your school? (tick all that apply)

	Yes	No
Textbook		
Passages made up by teachers		
Other coursebook other than the textbook		
Other (please specify):		

9. Do all the classes in a form:

	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely/ never
Do the exactly the same dictations?			
Do dictations from the same passage, but not necessarily identical ones?			
Do different dictations selected by their own English teachers?			
Other (please specify):			

Section C – Using English dictation as formative assessment

10. Are English dictations used for assessment purposes in your school? That is, do the students' dictation marks form part of their term marks?

Yes, in form(s) _____ No, in form(s) _____

If you answered YES for any forms, what percentage of the marks do dictations make up?

11. Are English dictations given:

	Yes	No
As classroom test ONLY		
As an examination instrument ONLY (that is, given to a whole form as one of their end-of-term examinations)		
BOTH as classroom tests and as part of the examination		
Other (please specify):		

12. Is there anything you do to prepare students for the English dictations? Yes___ No___

If YES, in which of the following ways?	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely/ never
a. In-class revision before having the dictation			
b. Penmanship (ask students to copy passage / words that are to be dictated)			
c. Remind students some possible mistakes they may make in their dictation			
d. Other (please specify):			

13. Who marks the English dictations?

	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely/ never
a. English teachers mark the dictations for their class			
b. Students mark their own dictations			
c. Students mark each other's' dictations			
d. Other (please specify):			

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

14. Which of the following aspects of student's English proficiency do you think can be assessed by English dictations?

I think English dictations can assess my students'...	Yes	No	Not sure
a. Ability to memorize correctly the words / sentences that are to be dictated			
b. Ability to spell a word correctly by listening to its pronunciation			
c. Ability to use punctuation correctly			
d. Knowledge about English grammar			
e. Vocabulary bank			
f. Listening skills			
g. Other (please specify):			

15. Are the English dictations followed up? Yes___ No___

If YES, in which of the following ways?

	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely/ never
a. Students write out corrections and which are checked by the teacher			
b. Students take home their dictations for their parents to see with parent's signature required as proof			
c. Teachers review errors and use them as a basis for further teaching			
d. Teachers revisit the common mistakes students made with the class			
e. Remediation is provided for students with low marks			
f. Other (please specify):			

16. Do you provide feedback to students after doing the English dictations or after marking their English dictations?

Yes___ No___

If YES, what kind(s) of feedback do you provide to them? (tick all that apply)

Marks ___ Grades___ Written feedback___ Verbal feedback___ Other:_____

Based on your answer in Q16, do you think the feedback you have given to your students is beneficial to improving students' performance in English dictations? (tick one)

___ Yes, it is because _____

___ No, it is because _____

___ Not sure, it is because _____

17. What is your view on the following statements? (tick the appropriate boxes)

I think English dictations help me...	Agree	Disagree
1. Understand more about my students' strengths in doing dictation		
2. Understand more about my students' weaknesses in doing dictation		
3. Notice the common mistakes made by students in dictation		
4. Notice the difficulties students faced in doing dictation		
5. Keep track of the learning progress of my students		
6. Brainstorm follow-up activities, tasks or exercises to help students tackle dictations		
7. Provide constructive feedback to my students in order to help them improve performance in doing dictation		
8. Raise my awareness on what I can do to maximize students' gains in doing dictations		
9. Improve my teaching according to students' performance in dictation		

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

18. In your own understanding, what are the characteristics of “formative assessment”? (tick all that apply)

- Consistent and on-going throughout the learning process
- Provides feedback to teachers to improve their teaching
- Provides feedback to students to improve their learning
- Used to check students' learning progress so that adjustment can be made to reach learning goals
- Other (please specify): _____

19. To what extent do you think the English dictations you do are used formatively to assess students' English proficiency? (tick one)

- To the full extent___ To a large extent___ Neutral___ To a small extent___ To zero extent___

20. Do you make use of the information obtained from students' English dictation to adjust your teaching?

- Yes___ No___

If YES, how? Give examples of the strategies you use and their effectiveness.

IF NO, why? Give reasons why you do not do so.

21. Do you think it is difficult to use English dictations formatively to assess students' English proficiency? (tick one)

- Yes___ No___

22. In your view, what is /are the challenge(s) ‘using English dictation formatively’ presented to you as an English teacher? (tick all that apply)

- Takes a lot of time to provide constructive feedback to students individually
- Workload is heavy for the teacher
- It is hard to keep track of the learning progress of every student
- There is very little or no value to use English dictations formatively
- Other: _____

23. Would you prefer English dictations to be used formatively? (tick one) Yes___ No___

End of survey
Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B – One-on-one interview questions

(1) Research question: What are the perceptions of Hong Kong primary English teachers on using English dictations as formative assessment?

Q1.1 In your own understanding, how would you describe what formative assessment is?

Follow-up: In your own opinion, in what way(s) can formative assessment 'tell students what they have done well and what they can improve'?

Follow-up: In your own opinion, in what way(s) can formative assessment 'constantly remind students what they can do more to improve'?

Q1.2 What do you think is the most important characteristic to make an assessment formative and why?

Q1.3 Let's say the students will have their English dictation next week, can you please describe in detail what you would do to prepare students for the English dictation?

Follow-up: In what ways do you think your students can benefit from the preparation you use to prepare students for the English dictation?

Q1.4 In Question 14 of the questionnaire, you agreed that English dictation helped you assess most or all abilities named. So what would you usually do to make use of all this information to help students do better next time in their dictation?

Follow-up: (For Teacher A) You even added an extra one, which is 'the ability to apply certain dictation strategies such as guessing uncertain words from the context of the text rather than just guess from its pronunciation' as a response to Question 14. Do you try to teach students any of the dictation strategies in order to help them do better?

Q 1.5 Can you please briefly describe what strategies you use to help follow up the English dictation?

Follow-up: In what ways do you think students can benefit from the strategies you use to follow up the English dictation?

(2) Research question: What are the challenges "using English dictation as formative assessment" present to Hong Kong primary English teachers and why?

Q2.1 What are the major challenges that you encounter when you implement English dictation as formative assessment and what are they?

Q2.2 What kind of support do you think you will need to successfully implement English dictation as formative assessment to promote student learning?

Appendix C – Focus group interview questions

Q1 Can you describe the study strategies that you employ when you study for English dictation?

Follow-up: Where did you learn this study strategy from?

Q2 Do you think there are other ways to study for English dictation besides memorizing every single word? If yes, what would they be?

Q3 When you do the English dictation at school, do you tend to listen to every single word that the teacher says carefully?

Follow-up: If you miss out a word or some of the words and the teacher would not repeat the content again, what would you usually do?

Q4 Have you ever been exposed to other dictation strategies during English lesson? If yes, what are they?

Follow-up: How often do you apply those strategies in doing English dictation and why?

Q5 Can you tell me what you can learn from doing English dictation?

Q6 Do you receive any feedback from you English teacher for your English dictation? Please give examples.

Follow-up: Do you think you can know yours strengths and weaknesses from getting that form(s) of feedback you have just mentioned? Please give some examples of what they would be.

Q7 Can you suggest some ways that you make use of the information obtained from the form(s) of feedback you have just mentioned to do better in English dictation next time?

Q8 Do you feel more confident in doing English dictation or learning English after receiving the form(s) of feedback you have just mentioned? Why or why not?

Q9 Do you think that doing English dictation motivates you to study English? Why?

Appendix D - Tables of questionnaire statistics

Table 4.1 – The subject teacher participant teaches at school

Q.1 Do you teach English as a subject at your school?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.2 – The current primary level(s) teacher teaches English at school

Q.2 Current form(s) at present you teach English in your school. (tick all that apply)	Number of responses
P1	1 (20%)
P2	1 (20%)
P3	3 (60%)
P4	2 (40%)
P5	2 (40%)
P6	2 (40%)

Table 4.3 – English dictation as a part of English programme

Q.3 Is English dictation used as part of the English programme in your school?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.4 – The primary level(s) in which English dictation is used

Q.4 Which primary levels are English dictation used with in your school?	Number of response
P1 - 3	0 (0%)
P4 - 6	0 (0%)
All levels	5 (100%)
Other (please specify)	0 (0%)

Table 4.5 – English dictation as part of the regular scheme of work and its frequency

Q.5 In the levels where it is used, is it part of the regular scheme of work?	Number of response
Yes	5 (100%)
No	0 (0%)
Not sure	0 (0%)
If YES, how often do you do English dictation with your students?	Number of response
Once every unit	5 (100%)
Once every 2 units	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0 (0%)

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

Table 4.6 – Type(s) of English dictation used

Q.6 What type(s) of English dictation do you do with your students and how often do you do it? (tick all that apply)	Number of response	Frequency
Seen dictation	5 (100%)	Once every unit (100%)
Unseen dictation	0 (0%)	-
Memorized dictation	0 (0%)	-
Free dictation	0 (0%)	-

Table 4.7 – Text type of the English dictation

Q.7 In your school, which of the following are used as English dictation? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
List of single words	3 (60%)
Single, unconnected sentences	0 (0%)
Texts composed of a number of related sentences	5 (100%)
Other (please specify): Verb forms such as past tense and present tense	2 (40%)

Table 4.8 – The sources of text used in English dictation

Q.8 What are the sources for texts used in English dictations in your school? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
Textbook	5 (100%)
Passages made up by teachers	0 (0%)
Other coursebook other than the textbook	3 (60%)
Other (please specify): The vocabulary book designed by the subject teachers Verbs extracted from the verb table in the textbook	2 (40%) 1 (20%)

Table 4.9 – Consistency of English dictation

Q.9 Do all the classes in a form:	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
Do the exactly the same dictation?	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	0 (0%)
Do dictations from the same passage, but not necessary identical ones?	4 (80%)	1(20%)	0 (0%)
Do different dictations selected by their own English teachers	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify):	-	-	-

Table 4.10 – English dictation as an assessment tool

Q.10 Is English dictation used for assessment purposes in your school? That is, do the students' dictation marks form part of their term marks?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
If yes, in form: P1 – 6	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
If yes, what percentage of the marks does dictation make up? 10 percent (20 marks out of 200 marks)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.11 – The context of English dictation

Q.11 Are English dictation given as:	Number of response
As classroom test only	0 (0%)
As an examination instrument only (that is, given to a whole form as one of their end-of-term examination)	0 (0%)
Both as classroom tests and as part of the examination	5 (100%)

Table 4.12 – How students are prepared for English dictation

Q.12 Is there anything you do to prepare students for the English dictation?	Yes		No
	5 (100%)		0 (0%)
If yes, in which of the following ways?	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
In-class revision before having the dictation	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)
Penmanship (ask students to copy the dictation passage / words)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Remind students some possible mistakes they may make in their dictation	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)
Other (please specify):	-	-	-

Table 4.13 – Marking of the English dictation

Q.13 Who marks the English dictation?	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
English teachers mark the dictations for their class	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Students mark their own dictations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Students mark each other's dictations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Other (please specify):	-	-	-

Table 4.14 – Marking of the English dictation

Q.14 I think English dictation can help me assess my students' ... (tick all that apply)	Yes	No	Not sure
Ability to memorize correctly the words / sentences of the dictation content	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Ability to spell a word correctly by listening to its pronunciation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Ability to use punctuation correctly	4 (80%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)
Knowledge about English grammar	3 (60%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)
Vocabulary bank	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Listening ability	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify): The ability to apply certain dictation strategies such as guessing	1 (20%)	-	-

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

uncertain words from the context of the text rather than just guess from its pronunciation			
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Table 4.15 – The ways in which English dictation is followed up

Q.15 Is the English dictation followed up?	Yes		No
	5 (100%)		0 (0%)
If yes, in which of the following ways? (tick all that apply)	All the time	Sometimes	Rarely / never
Student write out corrections and which are checked by the teacher	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Students take home their dictations for their parents to see with parent's signature required as proof	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Teachers review errors and use them as a basis for further teaching	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)
Teacher revisits the common mistakes students made with the class	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	0 (0%)
Remediation is provided for students with low marks	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	3 (80%)
Other (please specify):			
Re-dictation for students who fail	1 (20%)	-	-
Teach students some skills to avoid making some careless mistakes	1 (20%)	-	-
Students who fail need to copy the whole dictation content to strengthen memorization	1 (20%)	-	-

Table 4.16a – Teacher feedback on English dictation

Q.16 Do you provide feedback in any form to students after doing the English dictations or after marking their English dictations?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
If yes, what kind of feedback do you provide to them? (tick all that apply)	Yes	No
Marks (e.g. The total is 100 marks)	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
Grades	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Written feedback	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
If yes, please specify:		
Phrases to encourage students such as 'Well done!' 'Good job!'	2 (100%)	-
Verbal feedback	3 (60%)	2 (40%)
If yes, please specify:		
Teach students how to spell some difficult words using phonics	2 (66%)	-
Draw students attention on the words that are easily misspelt	1 (33%)	-
Other (please specify):		
A sticker or stamp given to student who gets full marks	3 (60%)	-

Table 4.16b – Reasons for the choice of teacher feedback

Based on your answer in Q16, what are the reasons behind your choice(s) of teacher feedback?
For those who chose 'marks', these were the reasons suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Giving marks is a compulsory according to the school policy - Marks is a simple indicator of how well the student did in the dictation - Make the student's performance in dictation become measurable
For those who chose 'written feedback', this was the reason suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage students to do better in future dictations
For those who chose 'verbal feedback', these were the reasons suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A direct way to draw students' attention on the mistakes they made in the dictation - Can teach students the skills for tackling dictation explicitly
For those who chose 'other', this was the reason suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage students to do better in future dictations

Table 4.17 - Teachers' opinions on English dictation

I think English dictation helps me to...	Agree	Disagree
1. Understand more about my students' strengths in doing dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
2. Understand more about my students' weaknesses in doing dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
3. Notice the common mistakes made by students in dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
4. Notice the difficulties students faced in doing dictation	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
5. Keep track of the learning progress of my students	2 (60%)	3 (60%)
6. Brainstorm follow-up activities, tasks or exercises to help students tackle dictations	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
7. Provide constructive feedback to my students in order to help them improve performance in doing dictation	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
8. Raise my awareness on what I can do to maximize students' gains in doing dictations	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
9. Improve my teaching according to students' performance in dictation	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
10. Push my students to study English	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.18 - Teachers' opinions on the characteristics of formative assessment

Q.18 In your own understanding, what are the characteristics of formative assessment? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
Consistent and on-going throughout the learning process	5 (100%)
Provides feedback to teachers to inform and improve their own teaching	5 (100%)
Provides feedback to students to inform and improve their own learning	5 (100%)
Used to check students' learning progress so that adjustments can be made by students to reach learning goals	5 (100%)
Other (please specify): The focus is on the learning process but not the results	2 (40%)

Table 4.19 - Teachers' opinions on how formative is the English dictation used

Q.19 To what extent do you think the English dictation you do are used formatively to assess students' English proficiency?	Number of response
To the full extent	0 (0%)
To the large extent	2 (40%)
Neutral	0 (0%)
To a small extent	3 (60%)
To zero extent	0 (0%)

Table 4.20 - Teachers' opinions on how they make use of English dictation to inform teaching

Q.20 Do you make use of the information obtained from students' English dictation to adjust your teaching?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
If yes, how? Describe the strategies you use. -		

Table 4.21 – Teachers' opinions on the difficulties in using English dictation as a formative assessment

Q.21 Do you think it is difficult to use English dictation formatively to assess students' English proficiency?	Yes	No
	2 (80%)	3 (40%)

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

Table 4.22 – Teachers’ opinions on the challenges of using English dictation as a formative assessment

Q.22 In your view, what is /are the challenge(s) ‘using English dictation formatively’ presented to you as an English teacher? (tick all that apply)	Number of response
Takes a lot of time to provide constructive feedback to students individually	5 (100%)
Workload is heavy for the teacher	4 (80%)
Hard to keep track of the learning progress of every student	4 (80%)
There is only little or no value to use English dictations formatively	0 (%)
Other (please specify):	-

Table 4.23 – Teachers’ preference for using English dictation formatively

Q.23 Would you prefer English dictation to be used formatively as an assessment tool?	Yes	No
	5 (100%)	0 (0%)

Appendix E – Summary of one-on-one interviews with Teacher A and Teacher B

(1) Research question: What are the perceptions of Hong Kong primary English teachers on using English dictations as formative assessment?

Q1.1 In your own understanding, how would you describe what formative assessment is?

**Teacher A mentioned that formative assessment should aim at helping the students to improve rather than just showing them a score or a grade that indicates their performance. She commented that formative assessment should tell students what they have done well and what they can improve so that students can do better in the future based on the information they get from the assessment. She also said that formative assessment can tell teachers their students' strengths and weaknesses in learning.*

Follow-up: In your own opinion, in what way(s) can formative assessment 'tell students what they have done well and what they can improve'?

Teacher A suggested that students could have a better understanding what they have done well and how they could improve based on the feedback given by their teacher. She commented that teacher feedback can be in written form or verbal form and it should pinpoint the strengths and areas of improvement in students' work clearly.

**Teacher B mentioned that formative assessment is an assessment that constantly reminds students what they can do more to improve in learning. She mentioned that formative assessment is different from summative assessment as its focus is on the learning progress of students rather than their final results.*

Follow-up: In your own opinion, in what way(s) can formative assessment 'constantly remind students what they can do more to improve'?

Teacher B suggested that a good formative assessment should let the students know very clearly their strengths and limitations in learning, giving the students ideas on what they can do to keep up with the good work and achieve more.

Q1.2 What do you think is the most important characteristic to make an assessment formative and why?

**Teacher A believed that how well an assessment could inform the learner his strengths and weaknesses in learning is the most important characteristic. Her reason was that a good formative assessment should let the learner see more clearly his strengths and weaknesses in learning. Therefore, the learner can know what he needs to keep up and what he needs to improve.*

**Teacher B suggested something similar that she had mentioned in the follow-up of Q1.1, saying that the most important characteristic is enabling students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. She also mentioned that teachers play an important role in making an assessment formative because they are responsible for giving detail and useful feedback to the students in order to help them improve.*

Q1.3 Let's say the students will have their English dictation next week, can you please describe in detail what you would do to prepare students for the English dictation?

**Teacher A suggested two main ways of preparing students for the dictation. The first one was letting students do penmanship two days before having the dictation. Students need to copy the dictation content twice and then hand in the penmanship book to the teacher for marking. Teacher A said that she would look for mistakes made by the*

students during marking. Then she would distribute the penmanship books back to the students in class and take a few mistakes to talk about the common mistakes students made in their penmanship books with the class. The second one was doing a 5-minute in-class revision with the students right before having the dictation. During the revision, Teacher A would pick some students to spell certain vocabulary items or write them down on the blackboard. She would also use phonics to teach students how to spell certain difficult words to strength their letter-sound relationship.

Follow-up: In what ways do you think your students can benefit from the preparation you use to prepare students for the English dictation?

Teacher A believed that doing penmanship could strength students' memorization of the dictation content and helped the teacher to spot some possible mistakes students might make in the dictation. So she could make use this information by reminding the students to pay more attention to those mistakes. She also believed that having a short in-class revision prior to the dictation can act as a last-minute remedy for students who do not study the dictation content very well. By reminding the students how some vocabulary items are spelt using phonics, this can help them relate the words with their sound, strengthening their memorization.

**Teacher B suggested 2 main ways of preparing students for the English dictation. The first one was doing penmanship as a compulsory practice before English dictation. Students need to copy the dictation content twice and hand it in to the teacher for marking. The teacher would mark the penmanship and circled the mistakes on the penmanship for students to revise on their own. The second one was doing short in-class revision before the dictation. Teacher B would pick some students to do word dictation on the blackboard and check if they make any mistakes. Teacher would then remind the students not to make the same mistakes again and sometimes teach them to make use of phonics skills when they try to spell a difficult word.*

Q1.4 In Question 14 of the questionnaire, you agreed that English dictation helped you assess most or all abilities named. So what would you usually do to make use of all this information to help students do better next time in their dictation?

**Teacher A said that she would emphasize on certain abilities that students are particularly weak in, for example, spelling ability. She would try to infuse the teaching of those abilities in her teaching as she believed English dictation somehow reflect her students' performance in those abilities. However, she mentioned that it is very hard to focus on all abilities that English dictation can help assess because every student may have different problems in doing dictation. With only one lesson for English lesson, it is difficult to address all the problems so she can only choose those that are common among students.*

Follow-up: You even added an extra one, which is 'the ability to apply certain dictation strategies such as guessing uncertain words from the context of the text rather than just guess from its pronunciation' as a response to Question 14. Do you try to teach students any of the dictation strategies in order to help them do better?

Teacher A said that even though she understands that there are in fact many dictation strategies such as teaching the children to relate the words with the sound and applying their grammar knowledge in doing the English dictation, it is very hard for her to address all this strategies with the limited time given to have English dictation. She said that she would pick some simple and direct strategies such as spelling strategies and memorization skills that can help students achieving marks in their dictation. She mentioned that many students resort to the use of rote memorization as the only way to study English dictation and it is challenging for students to change their mind from rote memorization to apply dictation strategies.

**Teacher B said that she would try to find out the aspects of English abilities that students are weak in when she marks the dictation. Teacher B also said that she would like to think of ways to help develop the aspects of English abilities that students are weak in in her teaching but she admitted that mostly she would just focus on teaching students how to spell words in the dictation..*

Follow-up: Why would you simply focus on teaching students spelling as a way to tackle dictation?

**Teacher B suggested that dictation to a large extent resembles a spelling exercise and therefore the most direct way to help students tackle dictation is to teach them how to spell with the use of certain strategies such as applying phonetic skills.*

Q 1.5 Can you please briefly describe what strategies you use to help follow up the English dictation?

**Teacher A mentioned including letting students do corrections, re-dictation for those who fail, revisiting the mistakes students made in their dictation and teaching students some dictation strategies to help them avoid making same mistakes.*

**Teacher B mentioned follow-up including letting students do corrections, letting students who fail copy the dictation content twice and sometimes reminding students the common mistakes they made to raise their awareness on avoiding making them again.*

Follow-up: In what ways do you think students can benefit from the strategies you use to follow up the English dictation?

**Teacher A said that the use of doing corrections and re-dictation is to strengthen students' memorization of the dictation content. But she suggested that the teaching of dictation strategies is more important than just having students reciting the vocabulary items. She thought that teaching students how to apply different strategies in tackling dictation is a long-term solution to helping students to improve their performance in doing dictation. The reason was that students need to come across different dictation content each time and students cannot just rely on recitation as a solution.*

**Teacher B said that doing corrections can help students understand what mistakes they have made and raise their awareness on not making those mistakes again. She commented that letting students copy the dictation text help students to have a more vivid memory of the words in the dictation text and this also acts as a warning telling the students not to fail the dictation in the future.*

(2) Research question: What are the challenges "using English dictation as formative assessment" present to Hong Kong primary English teachers and why?

Q2.1 What are the major challenges that you encounter when you implement English dictation as formative assessment and what are they?

**Teacher A suggested that time factor and students' study strategies are the major challenges. She suggested that it is very hard to give every student detail feedback in every dictation due to the insufficient time. As each student has different learning problems in doing dictation, the teacher can only choose to address certain problems that are commonly found among the students, so the needs of individual learner cannot be well-met. Moreover, Teacher A mentioned that students are very used to learning every word in the dictation by heart and tend to memorize everything without thinking much about the meaning of the text. It can be very challenging for students to adopt the dictation strategies that are taught by the teacher as they may think that memorizing all the words are easier than learning to apply different strategies.*

**Teacher B suggested that the fact that formative assessment requires the teacher to give constructive and detail feedback to the students is quite hectic for the teacher. With the limited time given, it is challenging for teacher to give feedback to learners individually. So among many things that need to be addressed in doing dictation, the teacher might just choose those that are important to the largest number of students.*

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

Q2.2 What kind of support do you think you will need to successfully implement English dictation as formative assessment to promote student learning?

**Teacher A believed that it is very important for teachers to gain support from different stakeholders of the education system such as the school, colleagues, students and parents.*

**Teacher B also suggested similar things as Teacher A.*

Appendix F – Summary of focus group interview with Students A, B, C, D, E and F

Q1 Can you describe the study strategies that you employ when you study for English dictation?

Follow-up: Where did you learn this study strategy from?

Q2 Do you think there are other ways to study for English dictation besides memorizing every single word? If yes, what would they be?

Q3 When you do the English dictation at school, do you tend to listen to every single word that the teacher says carefully?

Follow-up: If you miss out a word or some of the words and the teacher would not repeat the content again, what would you usually do?

Q4 Have you ever been exposed to other dictation strategies during English lesson? If yes, what are they?

Follow-up: How often do you apply those strategies in doing English dictation and why?

Q5 Can you tell me what you can learn from doing English dictation?

Q6 Do you receive any feedback from you English teacher for your English dictation? Please give examples.

Follow-up: Do you think you can know yours strengths and weaknesses from getting that form(s) of feedback you have just mentioned? Please give some examples of what they would be.

Q7 Can you suggest some ways that you make use of the information obtained from the form(s) of feedback you have just mentioned to do better in English dictation next time?

Q8 Do you feel more confident in doing English dictation or learning English after receiving the form(s) of feedback you have just mentioned? Why or why not?

Q9 Do you think that doing English dictation motivates you to study English? Why?

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

	Student A (P3)	Student B (P3)	Student C (P3)	Student D (P4)	Student E (P4)	Student F (P4)
Q1	- Recite the dictation content until everything is memorized, then do the dictation by himself as practice	- Look at the passage that is going to be dictated and check if there is any difficult word, then only study those words by spelling them repeatedly	- Copy the dictation content again and again until it is thoroughly memorized, then ask a family member to do the seen dictation with him	- Underline the difficult words and study them - (visual mnemonics) Draw some pictures related to the words to reinforce her memory of those difficult words - Ask a family member to do the seen dictation once with her	- Recite the dictation content until everything is memorized, then do the dictation by himself as practice	- Recite the dictation content and then do the dictation by himself as practice - Mark the dictation by herself and then recite the words that are wrong until they are memorized
Q1 Follow-up	- From the teachers at school - Told by his mother	- At school - His mother taught him	- At school - Sometimes at the tutorial center	- Invented by herself to use drawing to reinforce memorization	- At school - At tutorial center	- At school - Learnt from his sibling
Q2	- Yes, maybe not memorizing every word but some key vocabulary items	- Yes, just memorize some key words because it is not necessary to remember words like "I" "she" as they are too simple	- Not sure, the words may be easily forgotten if they are not memorized	- Yes, maybe not memorizing every word but some key vocabulary items	- Yes, maybe not memorizing every word but some key vocabulary items	- Yes, maybe not memorizing every word but some key vocabulary items
Q3	- Yes	- Yes	- Yes	- Yes	- Yes	- Yes
Q3 Follow-up	- Leave it blank	- Guess the words to see if they make sense in the content	- Try to memorize the words	- Make a guess by writing some possible words that sound similar to what the teacher read	- Write some random words	- Guess the words to see if they make sense in the content

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

Q4	- Use phonics to spell difficult words	- Divide the words into smaller chunks to memorize them easily	- Use phonics to spell difficult words	- If not sure about whether the verb needs to add '-s/es' or not, guess from the words in the same sentence within the same text. For example, if the pronoun is he/she/it, then '-s' or '-es' need to be added to the verb	- Not sure	- Use phonics to spell difficult words
Q4 Follow-up	- Sometimes - Recitation is easier than apply phonics	- All the time - Sometimes phonics can help him relate the sound with the words so he can spell the words more easily	- Rarely - Using phonics is difficult and he doesn't have much knowledge about phonics	- All the time - Sometimes she can't hear clearly the words pronounced by the teacher (e.g. the '-s' sound after the verb or plural nouns) and therefore she needs to guess the words. She thinks it is quite reliable	- No - Not sure about what strategies are taught by teachers	- Sometimes - Recitation is easier than apply phonics
Q5	- Spelling - Pronunciation of vocabulary items	- Spelling - Pronunciation of vocabulary items - Sometimes the use of grammar because they have been dictated for many times	- Spelling - Pronunciation of vocabulary items	- Spelling - Pronunciation of vocabulary items - How to divide long words in smaller chunks	- Spelling - Pronunciation of vocabulary items	- Spelling - Pronunciation of vocabulary items
Q6	- Marks - Stickers if gets 100 marks	- Marks - Stickers if gets 100 marks	- Marks - Need to do re-dictation if get less than 50 marks - Sometimes need to do more penmanship	- Marks - Written feedback like 'good'	- Marks - Sometimes written feedback 'good'	- Marks - Need to do re-dictation after school

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

<p>Q6 Follow-up</p>	<p>- High marks (over 90 marks) indicate good performance; low mark (e.g. less than 90 marks) would push him to study harder</p> <p>- Low marks indicate laziness</p> <p>- Getting stickers serves as a motivation</p>	<p>- High marks (e.g. 100 marks) indicate good performance; low mark (e.g. less than 100 marks) would push him to study harder</p> <p>- Low marks indicate laziness</p> <p>- Getting stickers serves as a motivation</p> <p>- Sometimes teacher may teach the class how to use phonics in spelling</p>	<p>- High marks (over 70 marks) indicate good performance; low mark (e.g. less than 70 marks) would push her to study harder</p> <p>- Low marks indicate laziness</p> <p>- Need to study because she does not like doing penmanship or re-dictation</p> <p>- Sometimes teacher may teach the class how to use phonics in spelling</p>	<p>- High marks (over 90 marks) indicate good performance; low mark (e.g. less than 90 marks) would push her to study harder</p> <p>- Low marks indicate laziness</p> <p>- Positive comments serves as a motivation</p> <p>- Sometimes teacher may teach the class how to use phonics in spelling</p>	<p>- High marks (over 90 marks) indicate good performance; low mark (e.g. less than 90 marks) would push him to study harder</p> <p>- Low marks indicate laziness</p> <p>- Positive comments serves as a motivation</p>	<p>- High marks (over 70 marks) indicate good performance; low mark (e.g. less than 70 marks) would push him to study harder</p> <p>- Low marks indicate laziness</p> <p>- Need to study because he does not want to get re-dictation</p>
<p>Q7</p>	<p>- Try to study harder next time if get low marks</p>	<p>- Try to study harder next time if get low marks</p>	<p>- Try to study harder next time if get low marks</p>	<p>- Try to study harder next time if get low marks</p>	<p>- Try to study harder next time if get low marks</p>	<p>- Try to study harder next time if get low marks</p>
<p>Q8</p>	<p>- Yes if get high marks in dictation</p>	<p>- Yes</p> <p>- The marks and the stickers I get showed that I have tried harder and my effort pays off</p>	<p>- Yes if get high marks in dictation</p>	<p>- Yes if get high marks in dictation</p> <p>- applying the strategies taught by the teacher makes me more calm in doing the dictation and I won't panic easily if I miss out some of the words</p>	<p>- Yes if get high marks in dictation</p>	<p>- Yes if get high marks in dictation</p>

Teachers' perception about the use of dictation as formative assessment

<p>Q9</p>	<p>-Yes - Getting high marks in dictation means that he has done well in English</p>	<p>-Yes - Doing dictation is compulsory so he does not have other choices but to study for it - He also gains sense of satisfaction from getting high marks in dictation and he can get praised by his parents</p>	<p>- No - He studies for the dictation only for the sake of avoiding being punished by the teacher for getting low marks</p>	<p>-Yes - Doing dictation is actually quite easy for her - Pushes her to study the vocabulary items learnt</p>	<p>-Yes - Getting high marks in dictation means that he has done well in English</p>	<p>-Not really - Reciting everything is boring and he does not like spelling too much time spelling words</p>
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