

Verbal Discourse Events in a Bilingual Formal Setting: Instructional Procedures in ESL Classrooms in Kenyan Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study addresses the issue of pedagogy in verbal discourse events in ESL secondary classrooms in Kenya at a time following educational reforms and policy change, and when concern is being expressed about falling standards in English language. It investigates the mode of instructional procedures with the view of establishing the relative learner-centeredness of the instruction. The effects of in-service training carried out as a precedent to the implementation of the current 8-4-4 curriculum were also studied by comparing the instructional approaches of teachers who had undergone the in-service training and those who had not. Seven research questions were posed in order to determine the variables that affect instruction. The study was cross-sectional and the sample was randomly selected. Data was collected from 17 secondary school teachers and their 480 third year students (16-17 year olds) in both Nairobi (urban) and Kiambu (rural) districts of Kenya. Triangulation method was used in data collection which was done through teachers' questionnaires, pupils' semi structured interviews, audio and video recordings of live verbal transactions and observation notes. The raw data were transcribed and analyzed through Second Language Interaction Analysis Schedule (SLIAS) and a multidimensional model to classify questions, which were specially developed for this purpose. The analysis revealed individual variation across the teachers in the use of various instructional behaviours. Teacher talk dominated the classrooms as opposed to pupil talk, which was only a quarter of the total verbal transactions and mainly in form of responding to teachers' questions. The classrooms were mainly teacher-centred and controlled and the questions asked were largely closed thereby constraining pupils' thinking processes. There was a tendency for in-service trained teachers to use slightly more learner-oriented teaching techniques than the other teachers. Syntactic, lexical and phonological features of the transactions were not intended to be investigated in this study. However, teachers' errors emanating from the above features were so frequent, as well as two discourse features: teacher's self-repetition and rephrasing of questions, that they warranted some investigation.

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