

Utilization of Interlanguage Strategies by Multilingual Learners in Nursery School Classroom in Kenya.

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Abstract

The Kenyan linguistic context is highly multilingual with over forty mother tongues. Thus, a majority of Kenyans are multilingual. As such, children from multilingual settings such as Nakuru municipality join school when they are already multilingual and are introduced to English that is used as the medium of instruction and communication. This is particularly the case in private schools. Limited ability in the language hinders the learners from effective participation in classroom discourse. Therefore, the present study investigates the question of how young nursery school children manage to learn English and use it for learning other subjects at the same time. It is based on the hypothesis that the learners with the help of their teachers do utilize various communication strategies to overcome the problem. Further, few studies have been conducted on language learning and use in nursery schools. The theoretical framework was based on the Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) model of classroom discourse under the wider framework of Conversational Analysis (CA) approach, supplemented by the Interlanguage and Communication theories. The study employed a cross-sectional research design and was conducted at the ACK nursery school in Nakuru Municipality. Purposive and cluster sampling methods were used to select one private nursery school, with an accessible population of 52 that included 49 learners, two teachers and a head teacher. Data was collected by use of naturalistic observation method supplemented by audio and video taping. An interview schedule and observation notes were also used to collect corroborative information. Data was analyzed by the use of Discourse Analysis, supplemented by descriptive statistics, and then presented in form of tables, figures and excerpts of transcripts (as examples). The findings revealed that the learners and teachers used three different categories of languages for various purposes in the classroom. The languages included English which was used as the main medium of instruction and communication, Kiswahili supplemented English while the use of mother tongues remained marginal. The learners attempted to overcome the difficulty of communicating in English by mainly switching to Kiswahili and occasionally from one of the languages to the other, often with the assistance of teachers. In this respect, code switching served as a communication strategy. It is hoped that the Ministry of Education will use the findings of this study to put in place policies that enhance classroom communication for effective learning and development of Early Childhood Education. In addition, the findings will provide insights to the existing body of knowledge in Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics.

Key Words: Interlanguage Strategies, Multilingual Learners, Nursery School Classroom, Kenya

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