

**CRITICAL SURVEY OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE  
ATTAINMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE PROFICIENCY AND EFFICIENCY  
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD KINDERGARTENS  
IN KENYA**

**Dr. Mwaniki Isaiah Ndung'u PhD (MBS)**  
Lecturer of Linguistics and African Languages  
Dept. of Linguistics and Languages  
University of Nairobi  
P.O. Box 30197 – 00100 GPO  
Kenya  
Email: [drmwanikindung'u45@yahoo.com](mailto:drmwanikindung'u45@yahoo.com)  
[drmwaniki@uonbi.a.c.ke](mailto:drmwaniki@uonbi.a.c.ke)

**1.0 Abstract**

The study reported in this publication was mainly conducted in a monolingual social cultural learning environment where Gikuyu is the dominant language of the ethnic community and in a multi-lingual language setting in an urban area where other languages are used. The study's aim was primarily to investigate the extent to which the development of academic skills in ethnic languages are integrated and sustained in early childhood educational institutions. The study discusses and integrates the existence of fundamental challenges in early childhood education amid competing parental expectation which are in contradiction of the linguistic communicative social needs of the child.

In order to analyze and discuss the linguistic and cultural relevance of pedagogical practices in early childhood education this study is grounded in both, the creative construction hypothesis Dulay et al. (1982) and the interactionist learning theory.

The study is informed by the social constructivist perspective which regards schooling as a system rather than a set of isolated activities. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative design in which observation and interview methods were used to generate critical data for analyzing pedagogical practices in early childhood kindergartens. The findings are consistent with theoretical issues that were raised in respect to questions of attaining communicative proficiency for pedagogical reasons in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual socio-cultural kindergartens.

**Key Words**

Child nurturing practices Language acquisition Language learning Interactive learning  
Creative Construction theory Reinforcement Pivot words Transformational grammar Social  
constructive perspective Pedagogical practices Kindergartens Communicative proficiency.

## **1.1 Introduction**

There has been noticeable change in the traditional practice of child nurturing by parents which was socially and culturally undertaken within the confines of the family. This change has witnessed a phenomenal increase in institutionalized child care services within the framework of early childhood education (ECE) where the terms nursery schools and kindergartens have become popular. In the traditional child nurturing practice, the family and immediate relatives provided the desired social and cultural environment for language acquisition and learning. Modern institutionalized child care services are popular nowadays among parents in both urban and rural areas since they respond to critical economic and socio –cultural challenges that parents are faced with. Despite their popularity, there are critical issues which have not been adequately addressed by educational experts and social scientists.

The provision of educational and social support service to this important sector is undertaken by uninformed members of the community with meagre resources or private investors whose knowledge of the critical educational, psychological, social and cultural development needs of the child is very rudimentary. This places child care services and social psychological development of the child in a risky environment. The operational guidelines that educational authorities provide to this sector have tended to be advisory and sometimes cautionary rather than principled and directive. Considering that there is phenomenal growth in the provision of childcare services which the parents have favorably accepted, it is only reasonable that the provision of the services are consistent with tested educational, sociological and psychological developmental needs of the child. For this reason, the fundamental and yet observable dimensions of the two processes namely language learning and language acquisition are of interest in this article. In some cases early childhood education providers lack professional training so that they are incapable of using social culturally appropriate activities that enrich interactive communicative abilities as part of the language learning processes. The learning activities that are used at times fail to address the concerns of the first language (L1) needs of the child in a multilingual cultural environment in order to bridge the social and linguistic gap between the home and the school environments. Language learning and acquisition is crucial for the development of both cognitive and social communicative skills. This development takes place in a meaningful social cultural environment. McNaughton has pointed out that *“children make or construct meaning from their activities but this meaning is co-constructed from the cultural activities and guidance given by significant others such as their parents, McNaughton (1995:3).* This suggests that socio – cultural language learning activities that are available within the family are enriched and enhanced during early childhood education experiences in order to buttress the communicative effectiveness of the child.

## **1.2 Review of Existing Literature**

There has been a great deal of valuable research work into the process by which a child acquires language and the influences operating upon them. The first researchers, Bellugi (1964), Bloom L (1970), Brown R. (1970) Chomsky Carol (1969), Dale P. (1967) in this field of child language within the transformational generative framework were impressed by the results of their work thus leaving the process of language learning to the general principle of learning theory. Language acquisition as a separate process did not receive scholarly attention. The imbalances will become evident as we cite the broad scope of the studies that have been undertaken in both fields namely; language acquisition and language learning.

### **1.3 Defining Characteristics of Language Acquisition and Language Learning**

There is a major distinction between language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition takes place during infancy and it follows a regular sequence in its development. It is closely related to other forms of biological and physical development of the child. But language learning starts at a later stage when language performance has already been established. While there has been considerable research in the field of language learning and language performance, the same cannot be said about language acquisition. Hence educators have been relying on theories of the learning process as a behaviour. The consequence has been the application of research studies in language learning to pedagogical classroom activities, Krashen (1981), Ellis R (1985). Language teaching and learning has been concerned with the creation of conditions under which language skills can be learnt while at the same time it involves the evaluation of methods and teaching materials which are used in the teaching of grammar. But it does not define “practice” and “imitation”. Imitation as a teaching procedure does not tell us what sort of behavior is in the learning process. Whereas we make a distinction between language teaching and language learning, it is the learning process which should be investigated so that we can create the necessary conditions for optimal learning.

Language acquisition takes place soon after birth when the child is developing physically and mentally. There must be an interaction between the physical and intellectual growth. We must therefore assume that the child’s capacity to learn a language is a consequence of maturation and the interaction of the social environment.

The stages of language acquisition are normally interlocked with other stages which are attributable to physical development and maturation particularly in stance, gait and motor coordination. There is no evidence that intensive training procedures can produce higher stages of language acquisition which means that it is not possible to advance language in a child who is still an infant. This is what most early childhood educational institutions are not aware of. We cannot use motivation in language acquisition. But it should be noted that deaf children develop a kind of non-verbal language which indicates that young children must specifically acquire language in order to cope with the social environment.

The utterances which are addressed to the infant may be modified or simplified in some unconscious ways by the adults who speak to him. We cannot say that they are logically planned. In language acquisition it is the child who selects what utterances to produce from his repertoire. Therefore the belief that a child acquires language by imitation and practice is an old one and has been recently incorporated into specific language learning activities especially in the learning of verbal responses. In this theory, the function of imitation is regarded as “acquisition” of responses while the function of practice is considered as “reinforcement. These are used in the learning of vocabulary which leads to increase in semantic length and the learning of morphology which continues in the school years. The child at school age still has deficiencies in vocabulary and his stylistic flexibility is still limited. He still will need to learn to fit utterances to occasion if his basic syntactic expressions are taken into consideration. The learning strategies the learner employs are of interest to the teachers.

Evidence from recorded utterances of young children by (Ervin (1964), Slobin (1966), has indicated that an infant does not spontaneously imitate a form it cannot already produce from the resource of its own grammar. It resists to imitate the forms which it cannot generate spontaneously. The main argument that language learning and language acquisition are different processes is that the learner is a different sort of person from an infant; that there has been some change in physiology and psychology at some point in the maturation process. These changes restrict him

from using some learning strategies. The two notions are included in what is classified as the critical period of language acquisition and language learning. Language learning involves changes in behavioural strategies and mastery in the use of semantics, syntax and phonology of language. This requires reinforcement and motivation especially when children go to school. The learning strategies become complex in multilingual environments like many ESL contexts where learners are exposed to language through formal education in order to attain several language proficiencies.

Educationists have placed emphasis on language as determinant of school achievement. It is therefore hoped that research into the field of language acquisition and learning would solve problems of language deficit.

It is interesting to note that psychologists have been involved in active research in the process of language acquisition for the last decade. They all believe that language is a significant factor related to thought and cognition. The latest linguistic research has developed better methods of describing language due to co-operation of psychologists and linguists. Their findings have generated fruitful hypothesis and thus Roger Brown (1973) suggests that *“it is the social communicative function of language which has been most important since by means of language man can transmit and receive information.* The relationship between language and thought generated speculation leading to many research studies. Vygotsky (1962) for example argues that thought and speech had different roles while their development although separate is not mutually exclusive. He insists that there is a pre-intellectual stage in speech and prelinguistic stage in thought. Thought and speech integrate. Thought becomes verbal and speech becomes rational. From this, he postulates his theory of word meaning. *“The meaning of a word represents such a close amalgam of thought and language that it is hard to tell whether it is a phenomena of speech or a phenomena of thought. A word without meaning is an empty “sound”*, Vygotsky agrees with Piaget that action precedes words. *“The word, was not the beginning; action was there first, it is the end of the development, crowning the deed”*. Piaget (1949) remarks that the child’s first, single word or utterance could represent expressions of action patterns. Sinclair H (1973) support this view by indicating that the grammatical relations used by the child signal the first distinction of cognition that the child makes between the self as agent and objects as external. Hence sensori- motor behavior is the basis for both language and operational thinking.

It is from this view that psychologists have attempted to study the process of language acquisition by recording and transcribing the spontaneous sounds of one or more infants. Roger Brown (1973) studied the speech of three infants; Adam, Eve and Sarah at Harvard University. He concentrated on specific aspects of child speech. In other cases, he set tasks to see how children perform. This approach was also used by Ervin Tripp and Miller and Lois Bloom (1970) with three year olds.

What does it mean when we say that a child acquires a language? Perhaps it may mean that the child learns to talk to his parents and other people. But, what preceded these? What must the child have learnt in order to be able to talk?

Language is a rule governed series of signals and the speaker must have an implicit knowledge of grammar and the meanings coded by grammar. The hearer must have similar knowledge worded to decode the signals. Language is made up of sounds which means that words decode the signals. Language is made up of sounds which means that language has phonological systems and syntactic features which govern how one sign is related to another sign. It has a meaning or semantic system which regulates the relationship between signs and their meaning. Thus a child must acquire the phonological, syntactic and semantic rules and the acquisition/ learning process involved in the early years translates into the learning process.

#### 1.4 Origin of Theories of Language Acquisition

The behaviourists views in early studies of language acquisition intimated that child learns language in response to adult stimuli. This theory is associated with the behaviourist B.F Skinner 'who stated' that speech being based on motor responses would use the appropriate learning model and would be described as operant conditioning.

Random action is rewarded and because of the reward, it is repeated until it becomes part of the behavioural repertoire. In the case of speech, reinforcement is social and Skinner says that it is learnt as echoic. The language acquisition theory based on this kind of assumption stresses the non- linguistic situation in which the adult acts either as a stimulus or reinforcement. These views were criticized by structuralists such as Chomsky (1959) and McNeil (1966) who stipulate that the infant's language is adult language filtered through a great deal of cognitive noise and impoverished vocabulary. Misunderstandings arose because of the assertion that child language was a different form of adult language and that it was a deficient form of adult language. McNeill emphasizes that recent studies look upon a young child as a fluent speaker of exotic language (1966: 16).

Empirical observations indicate that child utterances follow a definite sequence in which a word is later followed by two words utterances which are termed as holophrastic; meaning that they represent a wide range of meanings. A child uses one word where adults use a whole sentence; Susan Ervin Trip (1973:265) listed two early utterances as drawn from the Luo children in Kenya. (Blunt 1969) observed Samoan children (Kernan, 1969) and all of them indicated universal similarity between the speech of children at this stage.

Early utterances consist of words which in adult analysis would be classified as nouns together with words which modify the nouns. Braine (1963) divided these into "pivot" and "open". Pivot words are used as a form of functional words or grammatical operators such as "all gone" "big" "more" and "my" whereas open words are used for semantic purpose such as "boy" "sock" "daddy". Therefore the first rule in child's competence could be "*a sentence is a pivot class word plus an open class word*". From the point of view of the adult grammar, the pivot class contains adjectives, verbs and pronouns.

Gradually the child distinguishes modifiers and differentiates syntactic classes. Simultaneous differentiations are suitably intergrated into sentences until the child's sentences syntactically approximate those of adult.

Psychologists are interested in how the child is able to do it. How does he know how to attend to the specific speech elements rather than noises in his environment? Secondly; how does he acquire this complex system? Thirdly; is he able to abstract sufficiently to start speaking himself?

Chomsky (1957), (1965) in the first instance researched into syntactic category and proposed that transformational grammar is based on the distinction between surface structure and the deep structure of a sentence. A transformational grammar attempts to indicate that each sentence has deep and surface structure, Chomsky distinguishes between speaker competence from his performance. Linguistic competence implies the ability to apply the rules of language in order to associate sounds and meanings. Performance is the actual observed use of the language. Hence the study of language acquisition is the study of the development of competence according to Chomsky's work an transformational grammar, linguistics concentrated on the semantic aspects of the language, thus developing case grammar. Cases are basically the "role" played by an individual or a thing in an action identified in a sentence. Thus if we say "*Paul opened the bottle in the hall*" the units '*Paul*', '*the bottle*', and '*the hall*' have particular roles.

In pursuit of his analysis, Chomsky states that a child has innate inbuilt scheme from which he selects and pays attention to utterances. Each child, according to Chomsky, has a Language



Acquisition Device (LAD) which enables him to attend and abstract what he requires from the speech he hears around him, processes what he hears and then produces his own grammatical competence. The internal structure of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) is available in linguistic universal. This assumes that the basic grammatical relationship namely the subjects and objects are also universal. Greenberg (1963) states that there is no language which lacks these concepts and a child with innate knowledge could acquire natural language by finding out how his language expressed the universal concepts.

When a child is exposed to his native language he develops the hypothesis related to the nature of a particular language which he is exposed to. Therefore a child exposed to language has a capacity to scan the linguistic data before him and then react to what is appropriate and organize it as speech. Since adult and child share linguistic universals, the adult is able to interpret the child's early attempt to work out rules of the particular form of language which he has been exposed to, for example English, Japanese, Gikuyu or French. This theory by McNeil and Chomsky differs from that of behaviourist Skinner in that language is seen as a child's unique feature springing from deep structure of sentences whose base is the innate knowledge of linguistic universals and gradually developing the transformations so that the child is capable of converting the base structure to surface structure. McNeill summarizes the essential differences by asserting that,

*“if children begin their productive linguistic careers with a competence limited to the base structure of sentences, it is difficult to see how it can be explained by any theory of language acquisition that restricts attention to what a child might obtain from the observable surface characteristics of parental speech. Such theories would have to protect the opposite course of development, first structure, then base structure. Most behaviourist theories have assumed this order with notable lack of success, failure is inevitable when children produce only the base structure and behaviourist theories produce only the surface structure sentences. What is needed is either a child who commences acquisition with surface structure, or a theory that focuses on base structure. Since it is easier to change theories than children, the latter course has been followed here”* (1966. 52). What McNeill is proposing is in direct conflict with the early childhood curriculum in Kenya which gives prominence to the learning of English in most kindergartens even where the children share a common first language. It is common to hear learners in these early years reciting the English alphabet and are never exposed to the alphabets of their first language so that the creative potential of their first language is never given space to grow.

### **1.5 Language Acquisition and Cognition**

Lennenberg (1964/67) suggests that the biological aspect is vital to language and he agrees with Piaget *“that language is species specific”*. There is relationship between language and cognitive functioning. Language acquisition is biologically determined. Basically the infant organizes what he can see, hear, taste, touch or smell in his environment and thus organizes the motor movement of his muscles. The general principle of differentiation and categorization are the basis for both types of organization and these general principles of differentiation and categorization are the basis for both types of organization while these general principles appear in the form of verbal behavior. Thus words are not labels of objects; rather they are labels for cognitive process.

Language acquisition is influenced, by maturation and language readiness. It is also influenced by parents. Note that imitation aids in the language acquisition of vocabulary or phonetic mastery. Parents modify their speech both grammatically and stylistically when speaking to children.

At school age, most of the grammar has been acquired and his language shows a great deal of communicative competence. He learns the language he uses in games from peers. In teaching young

children their native language, parents and teachers give the child a way of categorization of experiences. This constitutes the differences between *acquisition* and any subsequent *learning* of foreign language. The child learns from the parents rather than the parent actively teaching him. What remains the source of controversy is concerned with the origins of the child's competence and cause of its acquisition. While it is possible to attribute language learning to experience, practice and imitation, we cannot do the same with language acquisition.

### 1.6 Methodology

The data for this descriptive analytic survey in which both qualitative and quantitative design were used was culled from four rural based monolingual kindergartens and two multi – ethnic urban based kindergartens. The four rural based kindergarten which provided the data for this study were in Murang'a County where Gikuyu is the dominant ethnic language. Three of the kindergartens are public facilities while one of them is a private enterprise. In the urban centre we identified two kindergartens where children come from multilingual background one of the kindergarten in the urban county of Nairobi is a public facility while the other one is a private institution. Each of the six teachers in each school was interviewed individually and then requested to complete two questionnaires. The questionnaires sought information about the language based activities, socialization and cultural learning activities and methods of learning. Answers in questionnaire were used to determine the effectiveness of learning activities. Each of the teachers was then observed teaching an interactive session in which specific learning activities were used. Care was taken to ascertain that the learning activities we observed and recorded were not the same in the schools we had selected. Teachers were however free to teach the interactive activities they considered appropriate for the four to five year olds in their schools. A total of 408 children in the six kindergartens were observed participating in interactive learning activities which were recorded on cassette tape and then transcribed for analysis and discussion.

Demographic profiles of participants in Rural based public kindergartens:

Group one

Kindergarten	Age	Sex	Total	Ethnic
A.	4	Males 16 Females 14	30	Language of instruction Gikuyu
	5	Males 18 Females 22	40	
B.	4	Males 18 Females 21	39	Gikuyu
	5	Males 16 Females 18	34	
C.	4	[males 17 Females 18	35	Gikuyu
	5	Males 19 Females 21	40	
	TOTAL		218	

Demographic profiles of participants in Rural based Private Kindergarten

Kindergarten	Age	Sex	Total	Languages
1)	4	Males 14	30	Gikuyu English Kiswahili
	5	Females 16		

Total participants in rural based kindergartens 248

Group Two: Participants in public urban based kindergartens

Kindergarten	Age (Years)	Sex	Total	Languages
E	4	Males 18 Females 22	40	Multilingual, English, Kiswahili English Kiswahili
	5	Males 14 Females 18	32	
			72	

Total for the Group two 160

Total number of participants in both rural based and urban based kindergartens: 408

Rating of Interactive Learning Activities

	Kindergarten	Language of instruction	Interactive learning activity	Frequency of Activity
A.	Rural Public	Gikuyu	Story telling and listening to sounds	3
B.	Rural Public	Gikuyu	Describing familiar objectives with sentence repetition drills.	4
C.	Rural public	Gikuyu	Giving simple riddles and singing	Daily
D.	Rural Private	English Kiswahili	Sentence repetition, reciting and memorizing	3
E.	Urban  public	English  Kiswahili	A poem a song with cultural meaning Interpreting ;picture stories	3
F.	Urban Private	English  Kiswahili	Letters Sounds and syllables recognition of Alphabet and words	3  4



### **1.7 Characteristic Differences Between Public and Private Kindergartens**

The term 'public' is used in this study to refer to community based kindergartens which are fully or partially supported in terms of resource provisions by the government. The parents in the community provide additional social support services such as transport security, hiring of support staff etc. The term 'private' refers to individually initiated educational early childhood educational and social services facilities. The investors in the private kindergartens have a profit motive and therefore are outcome based. The private kindergartens are favoured by parents who can afford the high fees that are charged by the management. These institutions avoid learning activities which have social cultural and first language orientation. They focus on purely pre-primary academic matters such as literacy skills while avoiding cultural knowledge. Drills and rote learning as well as memorization practices are popular methods of teaching.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

In order to analyse and discuss the linguistic and cultural significance and relevance of pedagogical practices in early childhood education in Kenya, this study is grounded in both the creative construction hypothesis by Dulay et al (1982) and the interactionist learning theory in which it is proposed that *"interaction gives learners the opportunities to incorporate target language structures into their own speech. The meaningfulness for learners' classroom events of any kind will depend on the extent to which communication has been jointly constructed between the teacher and the learners"*, according to Allwright (1984) and Breen (1985). The main challenge for researchers is to establish the extent to which meaningful learning activities contribute to communicative effectiveness and learning in early childhood since construction of observation and evaluation instruments present special problems.

In order to overcome the methodological challenges of observation and evaluation instrument this study focused on communicative classroom interactive activities in which the participation of learners in the learning experience take a discursive pattern where negotiation for meaning leads to skill acquisition. The teachers' role is to engage the class in activities which lead to mutual construction of meaning by maintaining conversation that involves the acts of clarifying, modifying, repeating or seeking clarification in activities like storytelling, describing common objects or people, singing a popular song, explaining sequence of event in picture stories and responding to riddles.

The teacher coordinates interaction activities which provide a platform for acquisition of knowledge that is associated with discourse practices and norms of communities. The study is premised in the social constructive perspective which regards learning as the appropriation of socially derived forms of knowledge that are transformed in idiosyncratic ways in the appropriation processes of interaction, meaning negotiation and other collaborative activities according to Hicks D. (1995) and Billet S. 1995. The current practice in the teaching of ethnic language reflect a growing awareness that first language enables learners to deal with abstract concepts since it facilitates the formulation of organizational networks Vygotsky's. (1986) explanation of language and cognitive development provides a functional theoretical framework for understanding why maintaining meaningful learning for children who are in linguistically and culturally diverse environments raises significant challenges in the evaluation and analysis of effectiveness and interactive nature of talking, singing, whispering, asking questions, listening to various sounds, listening to stories, storytelling, describing familiar objects, reciting rhymes and poems, memorizing sentences and using body language in communication. In order to provide answers to critical challenges that are significant in this study, answers to the following questions were sought:

- i) Is the development of cognitive academic skills in Kenyan ethnic languages sustained in early childhood education?
- ii) Are cultural practices, knowledge and norms which are experienced in the daily activities of ethnic communities reflected in the construction of meaning for learning purposes.

By providing answers to these questions the study will provide evidence in support of principled approach in the provision of early childhood education where the first language is used in order to remove the existence of mismatches in the communicative practices between the home language and the school.

#### 1 A) Rating of Frequency of Communicative Activities

	Activities	(Scale of 1-9)
Teachers' role	Questions eliciting	8
	1) Specific information	7
	2) General information	6
	3) Clarification	5
	4) Elaboration	6
	5) Repetition of answer	4
	6) Restating of previous response	5
	7) Confirmation of comprehension	7
	8) Initiating corrective answers	6
	9) Refocusing information	
	10) Modification	

#### 1B) Observation of learner interactive behavior

	Types of interactive answers Observed learner behavior	Frequency of observed behavior
Learners' role	Repetition	4
	Self correction	4
	Clarification	3
	Elaboration with rephrasing	4
	Response with circumlocution	3
	Response with hesitation	3
	Modification of answers	2

#### 1C) Evaluative responses

Teachers' Evaluation Reactions	Interactive responses	Quality of significance
	1) Acceptance of response	High
	2) Rejection of response	Average
	3) Partial acceptance of answer	Average
	4) Gives no acknowledgement	Low
	5) Responds to manner of answering	Average

## 1 D) Teachers' Evaluation Activities

Types of Teachers' Evaluation	Teachers, activities	Level 5 maximum
	1) Repetition	4
	2) Correction	4
	3) Explicit approval	4
	4) Implicit approval	3
	5) Contextualization of incorrect answers	4
	6) Specification of incorrect answers	4

## 2A) Public Kindergarten Rating of frequency of interactive Activities

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Riddles			✓		
2.	Oral drills				✓	
3.	Story telling				✓	
4.	Rote			✓	✓	
5.	Singing			✓		
6.	Role play and dramatization		✓			
7.	Memorization			✓		
8.	Reading pre-reading			✓		
9.	Pre-writing			✓		
10.	Picture interpretation			✓		
11.	Body language use				✓	

## 2B) Private Kindergarten Rating of Interactive Activities

Rating	1	2	3	4	5
Riddles		✓			
Oral drill		✓			
Storytelling			✓		
Rote				✓	
Singing		✓			
Role play and dramatization		✓			
Memorization				✓	
Pre-reading and reading					✓
Pre-writing and writing					✓

## 2.0 Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

A central concept which is evident in this study involves the idea that learning activities in kindergartens are planned within a framework of identity work. The activities enable the learners to engage in activities which involve socio-cultural knowledge and identity whose orientation is:

- i) The use of physical space and objects.
- ii) Interpretive practices which the realities of the social setting impose
- iii) Selectively associating with others.

Analysis of classrooms teacher and learners interactive activities clearly reveals definite teacher roles in which questioning practices facilitate meaningful content related responses by learners.

Teacher's questions form the main means of engaging learners in meaningful interactive learning activities by generating verbal responses and evaluating learners' progress and participation in defined activities. A key element in the design of data collection activities in which interviews and questions were used was to investigate the nature and place of questioning patterns in creating interactive learning activities. The six respondents are critical in creating and directing learning activities by structuring information.

The use of Gikuyu in most public kindergartens that we observed created significant interactive learning experience for further analysis. Observation of classroom interaction provides data in respect to specific assignment of roles in the classroom activities. The Flint system of analysis of interaction which I modified for purposes of description and making generalizations of the study findings was reasonably supportive.

### 1. Modified Flint's Categories on Interactive Language Based Activities

Source: Adapted and modified from Foreign Language Annals: 5:213 (1971)

		Mean ranking by the four teachers from public schools on a scale of 1-9	Mean ranking by two teachers from private schools
Teachers' supportive Roles	1) Deals with learners emotional feeling by accepting discussing, referring to past, present and future feeling	4	3
	2) Praises and encourages through complimenting encouraging and giving confidence and confirming answers	5	6
	3) Intentional joking kidding, making puns, creating humorous situation	4	3
	4) Using learners' ideas by creating instances of clarifying using interpreting, summarizing rephrasing	7	7
	5) Deliberate repetition of learner's responses	7	8
	6) Asking questions to which an answer is anticipated	7	8
	7) Giving information facts, ideas and opinions	8	8
	8) Correcting responses without rejecting	8	7

	9) Giving directions, requests, commands and instructions	7	8
	10) Directions pattern drills for different types of sentences i.e. substitution drills	6	8
	11) Criticizing learners behavior and communicating displeasure, anger annoyance displeasure and rejection	4	3
Learners' interaction roles	12) Responding to the teacher questions	7	6
	13) Choral responses by whole class or groups	6	4
	14) Responding to open ended or learners initiated questions which concern learners' ideas, opinions reactions and feeling	6	4
	15) Silence: No verbal interaction when using audio – visual aid	6	4
	16) Provision of answers by more than one learners	4	3
	17) Use of non- verbal communication	6	7

Comparisons of participation frequency of activities and categories of interactive learning activities in public kindergartens with private kindergartens reveal higher levels of participation in public kindergartens where Gikuyu is used. In these schools communicative activities are teacher controlled since they have a common language that is used. In the private kindergartens, English is used as a language of instruction. Participation in learning activities presents special challenges in the use of language to support learning activities. First the teacher has to teach oral communication skills in the second language through drills, repetition and role learning. While public schools use premium time in socio-cultural knowledge based interactive learning activities, the private schools use most of the activities to develop predominantly pedagogical pre-reading and pre-writing activities which are later used in the selection of children for entry in private primary academics. Children in private kindergartens display mixed communicative abilities in ethnic languages as a result of overly use of non-home language which is not used by parents.

There exist a fundamental mismatch between the social cultural knowledge and language that is used to guide interactive learning activities. The data shows that drills, memorization, repetition, rote learning are extensively used in private kindergartens. Public kindergartens are actively involved in interpreting and constructing the cultural realities through riddles, talk, stories and cultural songs. Learners in kindergartens where Gikuyu was used to support communicative activities were extensively engaged in reconstructing the social cultural realities of the speakers of Gikuyu. The approach that is used is consistent with the proposal by Taylor and Cox (1997) that *“there are integral relationships between cognitive and social processes”*. According to them

cooperative learning contexts are defined as platforms which promote interactive collaborative approaches in which the following components are included:

- a) Engaging learners in activities that ensure that they know one another (identity based).
- b) Teaching and promoting communication skills such as norms of interaction including those that address concerns of pragmatic norms.
- c) Designing learning activities that develop learners' abilities to solve problems cooperatively and collaboratively.
- d) Developing skills for generating different types of explanations.

The use of Gikuyu in public kindergartens, according to the study findings appears to operate within the four components (a) to (d). The data show that the role of the teacher is concerned with initiations in which requesting for answers or explanations as well as learners' responses and reconceptualisations were included in restatements, rephrasing, evaluation and expansion of knowledge. Interactive communicative approaches within a social constructivist perspective are supported by Lave and Wenger (1991) who suggest that learning is "*the appropriation of socially derived forms of knowledge that are not simply internalized over the time but are also transformed in idiosyncratic ways in the appropriation process*" as stated elsewhere in this study report. The findings in this study provide information which is consistent with this proposition. The challenges of language choice particularly in private kindergartens remain a major concern on pedagogical grounds whereas parental expectations are inconsistent with the needs of the child and these should be addressed from a pragmatic needs and rights of the child.

## 2.1 Summary, Conclusions and Implications for Teaching Strategies

Knowledge of language acquisition is useful to the language teacher because the teacher can plan the teaching strategies based on the understanding that:

- a) Children can acquire skills by practicing them. Thus they acquire the skills of language behavior only by engaging in these skills such as listening and speaking.
- b) Such a practice should take place in a variety of meaningful contexts. The child should be engaged in behavior which requires the use of language to ensure success and development of creative potential of language.
- c) Language behavior should not be corrected in the sense that a child is told that he has made a mistake as we have seen many mistakes are virtuous mistakes since they indicate that a certain point of development (interlanguage) has been reached. Rather the child should be answered in such a way that the teacher to ridicule a child's error in pronunciation, grammar or choice of words. Such ridicule reveals the teachers lack of esteem and lack of sensitivity.
- d) It is the modes of the words and their combination which is important, not the words themselves.
- e) The teacher should have insight into skills which require the maturational stages (readiness) so that he can plan how best to teach these skills such as reading and writing.

The emphasis placed on the learning of English as a second language has placed early childhood in Kenya in dilemma since according to Krashen (1982) learners should "*focus on receptive language skills, listening to the surrounding language speakers before speaking*" (1982). Elsewhere, Krashen (1981) clarifies that there is a fundamental difference between acquisition and learning. According to him, acquisition refers to "*spontaneous process of rule internalization that results from natural language use*". *Learning therefore consists of the development of conscious L2 knowledge through*



*formal study*”, in Ellis R: (1985: 292). I intend to discuss these differences further in the review of literature. Early childhood education in most rural environments is supposed to use the L1 of the child according to the existing language policy in Kenya (Government of Kenya Constitution, 2010).

Unfortunately this is not always the practice as is evidenced in a survey conducted for this study. In the urban centre nursery school children come from multilingual ethnic cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although Kiswahili is the favoured language that is proposed in the syllabus early childhood practitioners support the use of English as part of pre-primary preparation. Furthermore, early childhood teachers are not professionally prepared and educationally trained to cope with linguistic needs of children in multilingual and multi-ethnic background.

The deliberate focus on language learning process at the expense of language acquisition has placed a clear and rather narrow limit around the attributes of the acquisition of language. This is understandable because a number of scholars (Krashen (1981) Roger Brown (1970), Hocket (1970). McNeill D. (1970) and Fowler (1970) have highlighted the unclarified issues in language acquisition as well as the controversies in the origin and causes of child language generates. Fowler, for instance has pointed out that research in this area encounters methodological problems associated with data collection procedures and analysis. Despite the challenges in the investigation of child language acquisition it is my considered view that understanding how children develop language and the interacting factors would contribute towards the enrichment of the communicative effectiveness and efficiency. Ideally child care and educational resource support services for early childhood should be premised on the need to provide interactive activities that promote social communicative skills that enrich language learning processes within the social cultural environment these are not the only guiding principles. The socio- culturally language learning environment that experts propose should essentially address the first language (L1) of the child.

Comparison of participatory frequency of activities and categories of interaction learning activities in public kindergartens with private kindergartens reveal higher levels of participation in public kindergartens where Gikuyu is used. In these schools communicative acts are teacher controlled since the home language is used. In the private kindergartens, English is used as a language of institution participation in learning activities presents special challenges in the use of interactive learning activities first the teacher has to teach oral communication skills in the second language through drills, repetition and rote learning. While public schools use premium time in socio – cultural knowledge based interactive learning activities, the private school use most of the activities to develop predominantly pedagogical pre-reading and pre-writing activities which are later used in the selection of children for entry in private primary academics. Children in private kindergarten display mixed communicative abilities in ethnic languages as a result of overly use of non- home language which is not used by parents. There exist a fundamental mismatch between the social cultural knowledge and language that is used to guide interactive learning activities. The data shows that drills, memorization, repetition, rote learning are extensively used in private kindergartens whereas children in public kindergarten are actively involved in interpreting and constructing the cultural realities through riddles, talk, stories and cultural songs. Learners in kindergartens where Gikuyu was used to support communicative activities were extensively engaged in socio-cultural knowledge based activities. This approach is consistent with the proposal by Taylor and Cox (1997) that “there are integral relationships between cognitive and social processes”. Webb and Farivar (1997) have re-defined cooperative learning contexts as platforms which promote interactive collaborative approaches in which the following components are included:

- a) Engaging learners in activities that ensure that they know one another (identity based)
- b) Teaching and promoting communication skills such as norms of interaction including those that address pragmatic norms concerns.
- c) Designing learning activities that develop learner's abilities to solve problems cooperatively and collaboratively.
- d) Developing skills for generating different types of explanation.

The use of Gikuyu in public kindergartens, according to the study findings appears to operate within the four components (a) to (d). The data show that the role of the teacher is concerned with initiations in which requesting for answers or explanations as well as learners responses and reconceptualisations were included in restatements rephrasing, evaluation and expansion of knowledge interactive communicative approaches within a social constructivist perspective are supported by Lave and Wenger (1991) who suggest learning is "the appropriation of socially derived forms of knowledge that are not simply internalized over the time but are also transformed in idiosyncratic ways in the appropriation process" as stated elsewhere in this study report. The findings in this study provide information which is consistent with this proposition. The challenges of language choice particularly in private kindergartens remain a major concern on pedagogical grounds whereas parental expectation need to be addressed from a pragmatic needs and rights of the child.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Aitchson J. 1976. *The Articulate Mammal* Hutchinson London.
- Allwright (1984) *The Importance of Interaction in Class room language*; Applied Linguistics 5: 156 – 171.
- Billet S. 1995 *Situated learning; Bridging Socio-Cultural and Cognitive Theorizing*; Learn Instructions 6:263-280.
- Bloom Loise (1970) *Language Development: Form and function in Emerging Grammar* (CUP).
- Braine, Martin D (1963) *The Ontogeny of English Phrase Structure – in language* PP 1-33.
- Breene M. (1985) *Social Context of Language Learning*, in Studies in Second Language Acquisition.
- Brown R. 1970 *Psycholinguistics* selected Papers. NY
- Brown R. (1973) *A first Language* Cambridge M. A Harvard U.P.
- Bullock Report *a Language for life* (HMSO) 1975.
- Chomsky Carol (1969) *The Acquisition of Syntax in Children from 5 -10*.
- Chomsky N. (1965) *Aspects of Theory of Syntax* Cambridge, Mass.
- Corder P.S. (1973) *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin.
- Dakin J. (1973) *Language Laboratory and Language Learning* Longmans.
- Ellis R. (1985) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* (OUP).
- Fowler R. (1974) *Understanding Language*, Roger Fowler 1974.
- Ervine Trip S. and Mitchell – Kernan (eds) *Child Discourse* 1977 New York.
- Herriot P. (1971) *Language and Teaching* Cambridge University Press 1974.
- Hicks D. (1995) *Discourse Learning and teaching* Rev. Edu 21:49-98.
- Hockett CF (1958) *The Origins of Speech in Scientific American*, Sept, 1960
- Howe M. (1975) *Learning Infants and Young Language* Macmillan.
- Krashens S. (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Pergamon Press.
- Lave and Wenger (1991) *Situated Learning, Legitimate, Peripheral Participations* (CUP).
- Lenneberg E.H *A Biological Perspective of Language in Lenneberg* (ed) New Directions in the study of Language PP 65-88.
- Lois Bloom (1970) *Language Development*, The M.I.T Press.
- Lowell (1973) *Educational Psychological and Children* Unibooks.
- McNaughtons (1995), *Patterns of Emergent Literacy: Process of Development and Transition* (OUP).
- McNeill (1970) *The Acquisition of Language* New York.
- Paul Christopher son (1973) *Second Language Learning* Penguin
- Skinner B.F (1957) *Verbal Behavior* NY.
- Sinclair H (1973) *Language Acquisition and language Development*, in T. Moore eds, cognition Development and the Acquisitions of language NY, Academic Press.
- Stones. E (1974) *Readings in Educational Psychological Learning and teaching* Methuen and Company (Ltd).

Taylor and Cox (1997) *Microgenetic Analysis of Group Based Solutions Of Complex Two-Step Mathematical Word Problems By Fourth Graders*; in *J. Learn Science* 6: 183 – 226.

Stern H.H. (1967). *Foreign Languages in Primary Education*. AUP.

Stork and D. Widdowson (1974) *Learning about linguistics*, Hinchison Educational

Webb and Farivar S. (1997) *Developing Productive Group Interaction in Middle School Mathematics*, in *Cognitive Perspective on Peer Learning*, ed AM O'Donnell.

Turner J. (1975) *Cognitive Development*, Methuen.

Vygotsky L.S (1962) *Thought and Language*, Mass.

Weinrich Uriel, *Explorations in Semantic Theory* in Seboek (ed) *Trends in Linguistics Vol III* pp 395 – 477.

Weir Ruth (1962) *Language in the Crib*, Hague

Wilkinson A. (1975) *Language and Education* Oxford University Press.

---