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Children's Language Experiences During the Transition to Primary Schooling

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Abstract

Learning in Grade 1 takes place through language, which is important for learners' academic as well as social interactions. The aim of this article is to understand the language-related challenges learners experience when transitioning to primary schooling. A qualitative case study was conducted in three schools in the Motheo district of the Free State Province, South Africa. Data were gathered from Grade 1 learners using semi-structured interviews and drawings. This information was thematically analysed within an interpretivist paradigm. The findings revealed that learners often feel confused and hesitant when they do not understand the language used in the Grade 1 classrooms. Learners felt excluded when they did not understand English, particularly during vocabulary-related tasks. They tended to use their home language as a tool to support their understanding and express themselves. Environments that allow learners to use their home languages are generally more inclusive, enhancing both participation and confidence. Guided by the Bronsky framework, which integrates the theories of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, the article emphasizes the importance of socially and environmentally responsive primary school classrooms during the transition to Grade 1. The findings support the need for more multilingual and inclusive strategies in the early years of primary education.

Keywords: Bronsky framework; challenges; Grade 1; inclusive; language