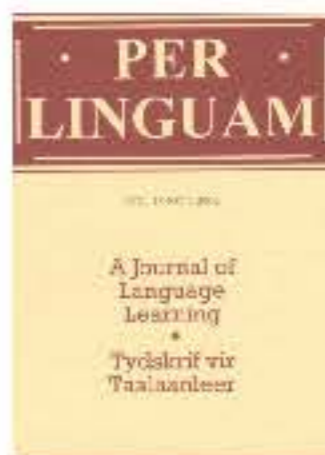


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## Factors affecting the initial literacy development of urban and rural learners in the Iganga district, Uganda

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The initial motivation for the study was data from the Ministry of Education in Uganda that suggests that in terms of academic performance, urban learners continually outperform rural schools at primary and secondary school levels (Ministry of Education 2002). At present all government examinations are written in English. However, the language in education policy in Uganda differentially stipulates the use English as medium of instruction in urban schools and the use of the mother tongue in rural schools (cf. Kyeyune 2004). Other factors which mitigate against rural learners' successful academic performance are untrained educators, poor infrastructure and school management practices in rural schools, poverty, lack of supportive academic discourse practices, and a general lack of enthusiasm among rural parents (most of whom have very little formal education) for their children's education. Using data from observations of selected urban and rural homes and schools in The Iganga district and field notes in the form of diary entries, the study draws on New Literacy Studies (NLS) particularly the notion of literacy as social practice (Street 2001; Gee 2000; Baynham 2000, 2001), to explore the differential effect of urban and rural-based acculturation processes on the initial literacy development of learners. Finally, since 88% of Ugandans live in rural areas (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002), the pedagogical implications for primary schools are discussed and suggestions are made on how to establish an inclusive education system.

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