

AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

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The Bilingual Education Programme (BEP) was initiated in the general education system in Sri Lanka in 2001. From the Science stream in G.C.E. (A/L) classes it was brought to grade 6 in 2002, not under the term “Bilingual education” but with different labels such as “Teaching selected subjects in English medium”, “Amity Schools Project” etc. BEP is optional from grade 6 onwards for both Sinhala and Tamil medium students to learn selected subjects in the secondary curriculum in English. In the Sri Lankan programme, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is used as the teaching methodology under the umbrella term of Bilingual Education (BE). The key concept in CLIL is ‘integration’ between the subject content and the target language. Therefore, it should be explored through a magnifying lens of high power to identify the interwoven relationships and internal connections between content and language. A ‘triptych approach (language of, for and through learning)’ in relation to the component ‘communication’ of the 4Cs framework provides a foundation to discuss the role of the language, interconnecting it to the content and cognition. To understand how learning happens in a BE classroom these three components play an important role. Hence, the BE teacher should be conscious of language production as well as concept development in the classroom, creating opportunities for learner interaction through dialogic approaches. Hence, the objective of this study was to identify the actual teaching learning process in a BE classroom as an attempt to gather insights for designing a broader future research project.

This study is twofold: a qualitative study; a case study to understand the prevailing situation in the BE classroom and document analysis of (TGs), syllabi and textbook of grade 7 and 11 (hereafter referred as curriculum materials) and to analyze the relevant content. Three Mathematics teachers (MT1, MT2 and MT3) and one citizenship Education teacher (CE1) in two National schools and one provincial school of type 1AB in the Western Province were observed in the case study. One lesson of each teacher was observed. Data recording was done in a transcript mode and coding was used for analysis. In all the observations, the researcher remained a passive observer. Two teachers had participated in BE training and only one teacher had heard about the term CLIL. None of the teachers had sufficient knowledge of BE and any knowledge or know how of CLIL. All of them, despite their subjects were conscious of content teaching only and had no idea about the role of language in concept building and meaningful learning. They used a very limited vocabulary mostly based on the textbook. Though they used code mixing (rarely code switching) they used it without any

understanding and not with the intention of developing meaningful learning in the BE classroom.

Mostly, discourse was one way, i.e., from the teacher to the students. Opportunities were very limited for student interaction among peers as well as with the teacher. It was limited to one- or two-word short answers as a response to teacher questions. It is obvious that language of learning (CALP/Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) and language through learning (CDF/Cognitive Discourse Functions) do not happen either in L1 and L2. Therefore, content and language integration to develop cognition cannot be seen in the classrooms. The teachers did not promote the second language (L2) even in the language for learning (BICS/ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) mode. Support which is expected to be provided by the curriculum materials to harmonize this situation is not at a sufficient level and they are also a mere translation of the Sinhala Medium materials and has not taken into consideration the integration of content and language. This study reveals that the teaching process observed in BE classrooms does not consider the integration of content and language under the umbrella term of BE. Therefore, BE classrooms are mirror images of monolingual medium (ME) classrooms where L1 and L2 are used without proper understanding of their power in concept building and developing metacognitive skills. The relevant curriculum materials are also prepared within a monolingual perspective and cannot be used by teachers as well as students to get more insights into the bridging of thinking and learning with the language.

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