



708/F

Teaching in the bilingual stream: A study on the perceptions of secondary science teachers

N A L A Nettikumara and M V Vithanapathirana
Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Colombo 03

The future of Sri Lanka lies in developing human capital that can deliver a rapid growth towards a knowledge economy. To generate new knowledge and use it innovatively, a country requires a scientifically literate population. Learning in English is also a necessity in order to uplift the scientific literacy which is essential to survive in the present day global village. The Ministry of Education has introduced Bilingual Education (BE) as a progressive effort towards fulfilling these aims.

The term BE refers to the use of two languages for instruction of subject content, rather than just the language itself. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach in which non-language subjects are taught through a second or another additional language. A CLIL lesson is not simply a subject lesson delivered in a second language. A CLIL lesson can neither be delivered by a language teacher nor by a subject specialist. CLIL lessons should be taught by teachers who are trained not only in the subject area but also know to teach content-based materials for language support. This study aimed to investigate the teacher perceptions related to teaching of science in the bilingual stream, where students are taught some subjects in English language while other subjects are taught in their mother tongue, Sinhala. The study was conducted with a qualitative focus and hence, the sample of the study comprised of ten bilingual stream science teachers in seven Sinhala schools in the Chilaw Education Zone. Unstructured interviews were adopted to gather teacher perceptions. Thematic analysis of the teacher narratives revealed that there were confusions among teachers about the need for a bilingual stream in contrast to the English medium education. They indicated that both teachers and students faced difficulties in using English in science teaching-learning. They were unaware about CLIL models. Challenges of adapting the English medium science curriculum for BE, problems of suitability of material and students being more comfortable with Sinhala are some of the issues that emerged. The study concludes that teachers in the bilingual stream perceive a range of challenges and there is an urgent need to address the training needs in the Bilingual stream of education in secondary grades.

Keywords: Bilingual education, CLIL, English medium, second language, teaching science

Acknowledgement: Financial assistance by Higher Education for Twenty First Century (HETC) Grant QIG Window 3 (Postgraduate Research)