

Challenges Faced by Content Teachers in Using Teacher Talk to Promote Language and Content Development and the Strategies they Employ

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the challenges faced by content teachers in using teacher talk to simultaneously promote language and content development in bilingual classrooms, along with the strategies they employ to address these difficulties. Conducted at Addalaichenai Madhya Maha Vidyalayam in the Ampara District of Sri Lanka, the study engaged ten content teachers from various disciplines, including Science, Mathematics, ICT, Geography, and Commerce. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected on teachers' perceptions of the difficulties encountered in managing content delivery and supporting students' language learning. Findings revealed significant challenges such as balancing dual instructional demands, limited classroom time, lack of professional training, and managing subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers reported employing strategies such as simplifying language, scaffolding, visual aids, rephrasing, and peer support to overcome these issues. The study highlights the critical role of teacher talk in bilingual education and emphasizes the need for targeted training and policy support for content teachers.

KEYWORDS: Teacher talk, bilingual education, content development, language development, teaching strategies, Sri Lanka

I. INTRODUCTION

English has become a dominant medium of instruction in many multilingual societies, shaping both educational practices and opportunities for students worldwide. In countries such as Sri Lanka, where bilingual education is increasingly emphasized, the role of teacher talk has gained significant importance in bridging the gap between language acquisition and content mastery. Teacher talk, broadly defined as the language teachers use to organize lessons, explain content, scaffold understanding, and engage learners, serves as both a pedagogical and linguistic tool (Walsh, 2011). Within bilingual classrooms, teacher talk not only transmits subject knowledge but also provides learners with linguistic input necessary for acquiring academic language, thereby playing a dual role in promoting both content and language development (Gibbons, 2015).

Bilingual education in Sri Lanka has grown considerably since the introduction of the government's bilingual education policy in 2001, which enabled the teaching of selected subjects in English from grade six onwards (Canagarajah, 2012). This policy aimed to improve English proficiency while maintaining access to subject knowledge, addressing both global and local demands for English competence. In practice, however, bilingual classrooms are complex spaces where students bring varied linguistic backgrounds and proficiencies, making teacher talk a critical element in ensuring equitable access to learning. Particularly in regions like the Ampara District, where Tamil and Sinhala coexist alongside English, content teachers face unique challenges in adapting their talk to support student learning in both dimensions (Perera, 2020).

One of the central challenges content teachers face in bilingual classrooms is balancing the dual demands of content delivery and language support. Cummins (2000) distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), arguing that while conversational English may be acquired relatively quickly, academic language required for subjects like Science or Mathematics takes much longer. In bilingual classrooms, teacher talk must therefore bridge the gap between BICS and CALP, ensuring that students not only understand the surface meaning of lessons but also engage with the deeper, cognitively demanding aspects of subject matter (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). This balancing act is further complicated by varied levels of student preparedness, as highlighted in the present study conducted at Addalaichenai Madhya Maha Vidyalayam, where content teachers reported difficulties in simplifying content without losing subject integrity (see Findings section).

Time constraints also emerge as a significant barrier. Teachers often feel pressured to cover extensive curricula within limited time, leaving insufficient room for scaffolding language while teaching subject content (Gibbons, 2002). As shown in the study, many teachers reported that adapting their teacher talk to meet diverse student needs was hindered by the limited instructional

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time available. This aligns with Hammond (2006), who argues that time limitations frequently lead to prioritization of content coverage at the expense of language development.

Another recurring challenge is managing subject-specific vocabulary, which often lacks direct equivalents in students' first language. Schleppegrell (2004) emphasizes that academic registers differ significantly from everyday language, making vocabulary instruction critical in bilingual classrooms. The study revealed that teachers often struggled to introduce complex terms while ensuring comprehension, echoing the concerns raised in previous research that subject-specific terminology poses a heavy cognitive load for bilingual learners (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017). Teachers' strategies, such as introducing terms gradually and encouraging their use in discussions, demonstrate attempts to mitigate this challenge, though such practices require consistency and training.

The issue of teacher preparation is equally significant. Many content teachers in bilingual classrooms are not trained in language pedagogy, and thus may lack the strategies needed to integrate language and content instruction effectively (García & Kleifgen, 2018). The study identified lack of professional training as one of the major limitations, with teachers expressing the need for more systematic approaches to scaffolding language alongside content. This gap highlights the importance of professional development programs that equip teachers with both content expertise and strategies for language-sensitive pedagogy.

Despite these challenges, content teachers also employ a variety of strategies to make their talk more effective. Simplification of language and concepts, the use of visual aids, rephrasing, and breaking down information into manageable units are among the most common strategies, as confirmed by the teachers in the study. Such methods align with scaffolding approaches described by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), where teacher support is gradually withdrawn as students gain competence. Similarly, Swain's (2000) notion of "comprehensible output" underscores the value of creating opportunities for students to produce language, an approach reflected in strategies like encouraging peer support and classroom discussions. These practices indicate teachers' awareness of the need to balance input and output, ensuring that students not only receive linguistic exposure but also actively engage in using language.

Another critical strategy is providing feedback. The study revealed that teachers often corrected language errors subtly to avoid interrupting lesson flow while still guiding students toward improvement. This practice resonates with research by Lyster and Ranta (1997), who suggest that corrective feedback plays a crucial role in language acquisition if delivered in a non-threatening and constructive manner. By fostering a supportive environment, teachers can encourage risk-taking in language use, which is essential for both language and cognitive development.

Overall, the interplay between challenges and strategies underscores the complexity of teacher talk in bilingual education. It is not simply about transmitting knowledge or correcting grammar; rather, it involves carefully orchestrating language use to create opportunities for both content learning and language acquisition. The present study contributes to this field by examining how content teachers in a Sri Lankan bilingual context perceive and navigate these challenges, and by identifying the strategies they employ to support their students. In doing so, it highlights broader issues in bilingual education, such as the need for professional training, the integration of multimodal resources, and the recognition of teacher talk as a powerful tool in shaping learning outcomes.

Thus, this paper situates the challenges and strategies of teacher talk within the broader discourse on bilingual education, while grounding its analysis in the lived experiences of content teachers in Sri Lanka. By exploring these dynamics, it aims to provide insights not only into the local context of Addalaichenai Madhya Maha Vidyalayam but also into the global challenges of balancing language and content in multilingual classrooms.

A. Research Problem and Purpose

Bilingual education in Sri Lanka, introduced as part of the national education reforms, seeks to integrate English as a medium of instruction in selected subjects while maintaining access to core content (Canagarajah, 2012; Perera, 2020). However, the effectiveness of bilingual education largely depends on the role of teacher talk, which serves as both a vehicle for transmitting content knowledge and providing linguistic input (Walsh, 2011). Content teachers in bilingual classrooms are required to balance the dual demands of facilitating subject comprehension and supporting language development. Yet, research has consistently shown that these teachers often face difficulties such as time constraints, diverse student language proficiencies, and challenges in managing subject-specific vocabulary (Gibbons, 2015; Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

In Sri Lanka's bilingual classrooms, particularly in regions such as the Ampara District, these challenges are amplified due to the coexistence of Tamil, Sinhala, and English, which complicates instructional communication. Many content teachers are not formally trained in language pedagogy, making it difficult to incorporate strategies that simultaneously promote content mastery and language acquisition (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by secondary-level content teachers in using teacher talk to promote both language and content development, and to examine the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on bilingual education,

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B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study was designed with the following objectives:

1. To identify the challenges faced by content teachers in using teacher talk to support language and content development in bilingual classrooms.
2. To examine the strategies employed by content teachers to overcome challenges and enhance the effectiveness of teacher talk in bilingual classrooms.

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do content teachers face in using teacher talk to promote both language and content development in bilingual classrooms?
2. What strategies do content teachers employ to address these challenges and improve student learning outcomes?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher talk is central to classroom interaction, shaping how learners access both subject knowledge and linguistic input. In bilingual or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) settings, teacher talk becomes more complex, as teachers must simultaneously ensure comprehension of content and provide opportunities for language development (Gibbons, 2015; Walsh, 2011). In Sri Lanka, where bilingual education is a policy initiative to improve English proficiency while maintaining equitable access to subject knowledge (Perera, 2020), teacher talk assumes a particularly critical role. This review explores the literature on teacher talk within bilingual classrooms, focusing on challenges faced by content teachers and the strategies they employ to overcome them.

A. Teacher Talk in Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse has been widely studied as the medium through which knowledge is constructed and shared (Chaudron, 1988; Walsh, 2011). Teacher talk typically dominates classroom interaction, often occupying up to two-thirds of lesson time (Nunan, 1991). Beyond simple content delivery, teacher talk structures activities, asks questions, provides scaffolding, and gives feedback (Walsh, 2011).

In bilingual classrooms, teacher talk serves a dual function: conveying subject knowledge and providing comprehensible linguistic input for language learners (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Cummins (2000) distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), highlighting the need for teacher talk to bridge everyday communication with the academic language of school subjects. Thus, the quality, clarity, and adaptability of teacher talk directly influence both content learning and language development.

B. Challenges of Teacher Talk in Bilingual Classrooms

1) *Balancing Content and Language*

One of the greatest challenges for content teachers is balancing the dual demands of content mastery and language development. Teachers often prioritize syllabus completion and exam preparation, leaving limited time for explicit language support (Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Hammond, 2006). Research in Sri Lanka confirms this issue, with teachers reporting difficulty in covering subject matter while also scaffolding English (Fernando, 2015; Perera, 2020).

2) *Students' Varying Language Proficiency*

Bilingual classrooms are marked by heterogeneous language abilities. Some students may already possess strong English skills, while others struggle with basic comprehension (Cummins, 2000). Teachers in Sri Lanka report challenges in adapting their talk to different levels without disadvantaging either group (Jayaweera, 2014). This often leads to reliance on translation or code-switching, which may aid weaker learners but limit exposure to the target language (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

3) *Subject-Specific Vocabulary*

Academic vocabulary poses particular challenges. Words such as “photosynthesis,” “equilibrium,” or “sovereignty” often have no direct translation into students’ first language and require careful scaffolding (Schleppegrell, 2004). Research highlights that introducing such terms too quickly can overwhelm learners, while over-simplification risks diluting academic rigor (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017). In Sri Lanka, content teachers frequently struggle to teach specialized vocabulary in English while ensuring comprehension (Perera, 2020).

4) *Time Constraints*

Teachers often cite limited instructional time as a key barrier to adapting teacher talk (Hammond, 2006). In bilingual classrooms, lessons require additional scaffolding and checks for understanding, which may not be feasible within rigid timetables. The Sri Lankan bilingual curriculum, modeled on national syllabi, leaves little room for extended language support, increasing teacher workload and pressure (Fernando, 2015).

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5) *Lack of Training and Professional Development*

Many content teachers are specialists in their subjects but lack training in second language pedagogy (García & Kleifgen, 2018). Research shows that without targeted professional development, teachers struggle to integrate language objectives into content lessons effectively (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). In Sri Lanka, professional development for bilingual teaching has been limited, leaving many teachers unprepared for the linguistic challenges of bilingual classrooms (Jayaweera, 2014; Perera, 2020).

C. Strategies Employed by Teachers

Despite these challenges, research identifies a range of strategies content teachers use to make teacher talk more effective.

1) *Simplification and Rephrasing*

Simplifying language, rephrasing explanations, and breaking content into smaller parts are common strategies (Gibbons, 2002; Walsh, 2011). Teachers adapt their talk to ensure comprehensibility without oversimplifying subject matter. This aligns with Cummins' (2000) recommendation to provide "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985) slightly above students' current level.

2) *Use of Visual Aids and Multimodal Support*

Visual supports such as diagrams, real-life examples, and gestures enhance both content comprehension and language development (Schleppegrell, 2004; Echevarria et al., 2017). Studies in Sri Lanka show that teachers frequently rely on diagrams, charts, and realia to bridge linguistic gaps (Fernando, 2015).

3) *Scaffolding and Incremental Complexity*

Scaffolding is central to bilingual pedagogy. Teachers often begin with simplified explanations and gradually increase linguistic and conceptual complexity (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Gibbons, 2015). This incremental approach supports both comprehension and gradual exposure to academic language.

4) *Encouraging Peer Support*

Collaborative learning strategies, such as pairing stronger and weaker students, create opportunities for peer scaffolding (Swain, 2000). Teachers encourage group discussions, where students can use both first language and English, thereby mediating understanding and promoting participation (Mercer & Howe, 2012).

5) *Feedback and Error Correction*

Corrective feedback is another important strategy. Lyster and Ranta (1997) emphasize that subtle corrections, such as recasts, are effective in improving accuracy without discouraging learners. In Sri Lanka, teachers often provide indirect feedback to avoid interrupting lesson flow while still guiding language development (Perera, 2020).

6) *Creating a Supportive Environment*

Encouraging student questions and fostering an atmosphere where mistakes are tolerated helps reduce anxiety and increases participation (Walsh, 2011). Research shows that positive interpersonal cues, encouragement, and patience are critical for motivating students to engage with both content and language (Alexander, 2018).

D. Teacher Talk in the Sri Lankan Context

Sri Lanka's bilingual education policy has created unique dynamics in classroom discourse. Studies show that while teachers recognize the importance of using English, they often fall back on Tamil or Sinhala when faced with comprehension difficulties (Fernando, 2015). This code-switching is sometimes necessary but can limit exposure to academic English (Perera, 2020).

Teachers in the Ampara District, where this study is based, face additional challenges due to linguistic diversity. With Tamil-speaking majorities and Sinhala minorities, teachers must navigate not only English but also inter-ethnic communication (Jayaweera, 2014). Teacher talk thus becomes a site of negotiation, balancing equity, inclusion, and pedagogical effectiveness.

E. Theoretical Perspectives on Teacher Talk

1) *Input and Output Hypotheses*

Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis underscores the importance of comprehensible input, while Swain's (2000) output hypothesis stresses opportunities for student language production. Teacher talk must therefore not only deliver comprehensible input but also create conditions for meaningful output.

2) *Scaffolding Theory*

Vygotskian perspectives emphasize the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where scaffolding enables learners to accomplish tasks they cannot complete independently (Wood et al., 1976). Teacher talk is the primary means of scaffolding in bilingual classrooms.

3) *Sociocultural Approaches*

Sociocultural theory views classroom discourse as socially mediated, where meaning is co-constructed through dialogue (Mercer & Howe, 2012). In this sense, teacher talk is not merely directive but dialogic, fostering student agency and participation.

The literature demonstrates that teacher talk is central to bilingual classrooms, serving both pedagogical and linguistic functions. Content teachers face multiple challenges, including balancing content and language, managing diverse student proficiency levels,

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teaching subject-specific vocabulary, and working within time and training constraints. However, teachers also employ strategies such as simplification, scaffolding, visual aids, peer support, and feedback to address these challenges.

In Sri Lanka, these dynamics are shaped by policy reforms, linguistic diversity, and resource limitations. The findings of this review underscore the need for systematic teacher training and professional development to equip content teachers with strategies for effective teacher talk. This study contributes to the field by examining how Sri Lankan content teachers navigate these complexities, adding to global discussions on bilingual education, CLIL, and classroom discourse.

F. Research Gap

Although extensive research has explored the role of teacher talk in classroom discourse, much of it has focused on general second language acquisition or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Walsh, 2011; Nunan, 1991). Studies in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) highlight how teacher talk can scaffold both subject knowledge and language development (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011), yet these investigations are primarily situated in European contexts where resources and teacher training are relatively well established. In contrast, less attention has been given to resource-constrained and multilingual contexts such as Sri Lanka, where bilingual education policies intersect with diverse linguistic realities.

In Sri Lanka, existing studies on bilingual education have mainly examined policy implementation, parental perceptions, and student achievement (Jayaweera, 2014; Perera, 2020). While some research acknowledges the challenges faced by content teachers, such as varying student proficiency levels and lack of training (Fernando, 2015), there remains a limited focus on how teacher talk itself functions as both a challenge and a strategy in bilingual classrooms. Specifically, few studies have systematically analyzed the ways in which content teachers adapt their talk to support both content mastery and language development, or the extent to which these adaptations are effective.

Moreover, the professional development of content teachers in Sri Lanka has not adequately addressed the dual role of teacher talk in bilingual instruction (García & Kleifgen, 2018). This creates a gap in understanding how teachers themselves perceive their communicative practices, the difficulties they encounter, and the strategies they employ. Addressing this gap is crucial to inform targeted interventions, enhance teacher training, and develop pedagogical frameworks that integrate both language and content objectives in multilingual classrooms.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate the challenges faced by content teachers in using teacher talk to promote language and content development, as well as the strategies they employ. Mixed-methods research is particularly valuable in educational studies because it allows for a more comprehensive exploration of complex classroom phenomena by combining numerical data with contextual insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The quantitative component relied on structured questionnaires administered to content teachers. This method provided measurable data on recurring challenges and strategies, enabling trends and patterns to be identified across multiple subjects. Quantitative analysis helped to capture the prevalence of key issues such as time constraints, vocabulary challenges, and lack of training.

The qualitative component was integrated through classroom observations and teacher reflections, which offered a deeper understanding of how teacher talk was used in practice. Qualitative approaches are essential in studies of classroom discourse because they highlight the contextual and interactional dynamics that cannot be fully represented by numerical data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Walsh, 2011). Together, these approaches enhanced the validity and richness of the study by triangulating findings. Thus, this research design was selected to balance breadth and depth, ensuring that the study not only documented the challenges content teachers face but also illuminated the pedagogical strategies they employ within real classroom settings.

B. Study Setting

The study was conducted at Addalaichenai Madhya Maha Vidyalayam, a large secondary school located in the Ampara District of Eastern Sri Lanka. The Ampara District is linguistically diverse, comprising a substantial Tamil-speaking population alongside Sinhala speakers. English, as a second language, plays a significant role in education, particularly through the government's bilingual education policy, which allows selected subjects to be taught in English from Grade 6 onwards (Perera, 2020).

Addalaichenai Madhya Maha Vidyalayam was chosen for several reasons. First, it is one of the prominent schools in the district that provides bilingual education from Grades 6 to 11, making it a representative case for studying the intersection of language and content teaching in a bilingual program. Second, the school's accessibility made it a practical site for sustained data collection. Third, the presence of a diverse student population, taught in both Tamil and English, provided a rich context to investigate how teacher talk mediates both content comprehension and language development.

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The setting exemplifies the broader challenges and opportunities of bilingual education in Sri Lanka, where teachers are expected to deliver subject content in English despite variations in their own language proficiency and training (Fernando, 2015). It also mirrors the multilingual realities of Sri Lankan classrooms, where teacher talk often functions as a bridge between Tamil, Sinhala, and English.

C. Sampling Procedure

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that selects participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling was particularly appropriate because the study sought to investigate the experiences of teachers directly involved in bilingual education rather than a random population of teachers.

Participants were selected from the pool of secondary-level content teachers at Addalaichenai Madhya Maha Vidyalayam who were actively teaching in the bilingual program. Teachers from different subjects, including Geography, Science, Mathematics, Commerce, and ICT were purposefully chosen to capture subject-specific language requirements and diverse instructional approaches. Including multiple subjects ensured that findings reflected a broad range of disciplinary challenges in teacher talk. Students were included as indirect participants, as the study examined teacher talk within the bilingual classrooms in which they were enrolled. However, the primary focus remained on content teachers as the direct participants.

D. Participants

The study included 10 content teachers as primary participants: seven female and three male teachers. They represented a variety of subject areas including Science, Mathematics, ICT, Geography, and Commerce. This diversity allowed the study to identify both common and subject-specific challenges in teacher talk.

These teachers brought different levels of professional experience and exposure to bilingual instruction, which provided a nuanced understanding of how teacher talk was shaped by training, confidence, and classroom realities. None of the teachers had formal qualifications in second language pedagogy, reflecting a broader trend in Sri Lankan bilingual education where content specialists are assigned to teach in English without comprehensive linguistic preparation (Jayaweera, 2014).

The indirect participants were the students of these teachers, enrolled in the bilingual program from Grades 6 to 11. Their role was primarily to provide context for the teachers' experiences, as teacher talk is inherently interactive and shaped by student responses, language proficiency levels, and content needs.

E. Research Instruments

1) Structured Questionnaire

The primary research instrument was a **structured questionnaire** administered to the 10 content teachers. Structured questionnaires are effective for collecting standardized data across participants and are particularly useful for identifying recurring themes and challenges (Creswell, 2014).

The questionnaire consisted of 11 items, designed to address three main areas:

Challenges in promoting content development: Items examined issues such as simplifying content for diverse learners, gauging comprehension, and teaching subject-specific vocabulary.

Challenges in promoting language development: Items explored obstacles such as varying levels of language proficiency, difficulties in simplifying language without losing accuracy, and disruptions caused by correcting language errors.

Strategies for overcoming challenges: Items asked teachers to describe strategies like simplifying language, rephrasing explanations, using visual aids, scaffolding, and providing language prompts.

The questionnaire combined closed-ended and open-ended items to allow both quantitative measurement and qualitative elaboration of teacher experiences.

F. Data Analysis

The analysis of the questionnaire data employed a quantitative descriptive approach, focusing on identifying and summarizing patterns in the challenges and strategies reported by teachers. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were used to determine the prevalence of specific challenges such as time constraints, balancing content and language demands, and lack of professional training. Similarly, strategies such as the use of visuals, simplification of language, incremental scaffolding, and peer support were examined to assess how commonly they were employed by the teachers.

The results were presented using tables and charts, which provided a clear visualization of the trends emerging from the data. This approach enabled the study to highlight the most pressing issues encountered by content teachers in bilingual classrooms and the strategies they most frequently used to address these challenges.

By relying on descriptive statistics, the study was able to provide an accurate overview of the challenges and strategies related to teacher talk in the selected context, while remaining closely aligned with its quantitative research design. This methodological

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choice also reflects Creswell's (2014) assertion that descriptive analysis is appropriate for studies aiming to explore trends and summarize participant responses in an accessible manner.

G. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided the research process to ensure respect, confidentiality, and informed consent. Teachers were briefed about the purpose of the study and assured that participation was voluntary. Their responses were anonymized to protect their identities. As students were included only as indirect participants, no identifying data were collected from them. Approval was obtained from the school administration prior to data collection, in line with ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2018).

IV. FINDINGS

To investigate the challenges and limitations that content teachers face in using teacher talk to promote both language and content development in secondary bilingual students, a structured questionnaire was administered to 10 content teachers across various subjects, including Science, Mathematics, ICT, and Geography. The questionnaire comprised 11 targeted questions that explored the specific difficulties and strategies employed by these teachers in bilingual settings. The teachers were asked to reflect on the dual role of teacher talk in facilitating content understanding and language acquisition among students with varying language proficiencies. The analysis of the questionnaire responses is presented below. The following section outlines the key challenges and strategies reported by content teachers, highlighting the limitations they face in promoting both content and language development in bilingual classrooms.

The table below summarizes the responses gathered on the challenges and limitations content teachers encounter when using teacher talk to support bilingual students' language and content development. These insights highlight the key areas where teachers face obstacles in effectively fostering both language acquisition and subject understanding.

Table 4.1: Summary of the responses gathered on the challenges and strategies

Questions and options	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. What are the main challenges you encounter when using teacher talk to promote content development in bilingual students										
Difficulty in simplifying content for diverse learners			×			×				
Gauging students' content understanding in real-time			×				×		×	
Varying levels of prior knowledge among students	×		×		×	×	×	×	×	
Limited time to cover all required content	×	×		×	×					×
2. How do you ensure that students grasp the content while teaching in a bilingual setting?										
Simplifying complex concepts using examples	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	×
Using visual aids and real-life applications	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	×
Checking for content understanding frequently		×		×		×				
Encouraging content-related questions	×	×	×	×	×	×				×
3. How do you handle situations where students struggle with understanding the content?										
Rephrasing content explanations		×	×		×		×			×
Breaking down content into smaller, digestible parts	×	×	×	×		×		×	×	×
Pairing students with peers for content support			×	×	×			×		×
Encouraging students to ask content-related questions			×	×	×	×		×		×
4. How do you manage the complexity of subject-specific vocabulary when teaching content to bilingual students?										
Introducing content vocabulary gradually	×	×	×	×	×	×		×		
Using visual aids or examples to explain terminology			×	×		×				×
Providing vocabulary lists with content-specific definitions	×	×	×		×					

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Encouraging students to use new content-related vocabulary in discussions	x		x	x			x		x	x
5. What are the main challenges you encounter when using teacher talk to promote language development in bilingual students?										
Difficulty in simplifying language while maintaining accuracy			x			x				
Varying levels of language proficiency among students			x	x	x	x		x		x
Limited time to focus on language development	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
6. How do you ensure that students develop their language skills while teaching content?										
Simplifying language and using key vocabulary			x	x	x			x		x
Using visual supports or gestures to aid language comprehension						x		x		x
Checking for language understanding frequently	x	x	x				x		x	
Encouraging students to ask language-related questions				x	x	x		x		x
7. How do you handle situations where students struggle with the language of instruction?										
Rephrasing language explanations			x	x	x	x		x		x
Providing sentence starters or language prompts										
Pairing students with peers for language support			x	x	x					x
Creating a supportive atmosphere for language-related questions	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	
8. How do you scaffold your teacher talk to help students understand complex language concepts?										
Starting with simpler language and gradually increasing complexity	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Using sentence frames or language prompts					x					
Connecting new language concepts to familiar ones			x	x			x		x	x
9. How do you give feedback on students' language use during lessons?										
Providing specific language-related feedback			x		x		x		x	x
Correcting errors subtly without disrupting the flow of the lesson	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Highlighting strengths in language use along with areas for improvement	x	x	x			x				
10. What challenges arise when trying to correct language errors without interrupting the content learning process?										
Difficulty finding the right moment to correct language					x	x				
Risk of disrupting the content-learning flow	x		x							
Balancing between content and language corrections		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
11. What are the challenges in adapting your teacher talk to meet the varying language proficiency levels in bilingual classroom?										
Maintaining language engagement among all students			x	x			x	x	x	x

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Varying language comprehension levels in discussions			×		×					
Different levels of language participation from students	×	×	×	×	×	×				×

Main challenges in promoting content development through teacher talk

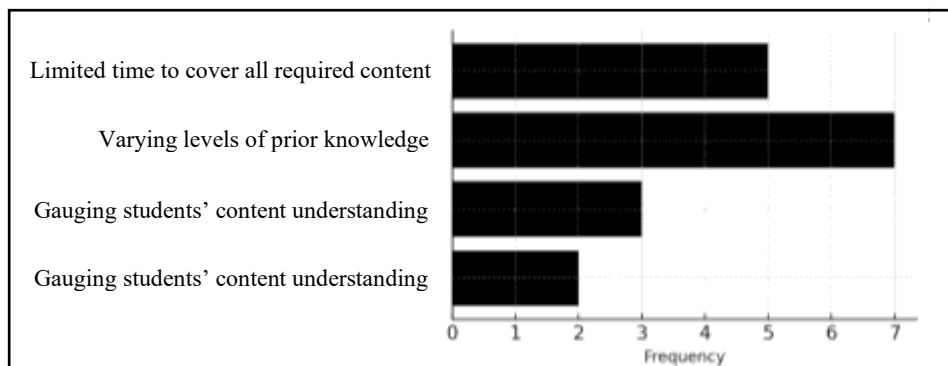


Figure 4.1: Main challenges in promoting content development through teacher talk

This chart presents responses from ten teachers about the challenges they face when promoting content development. The most commonly reported challenge was managing varying levels of prior knowledge among students, with seven teachers marking this as a significant issue. Five teachers highlighted the limited time to cover the required content as a barrier. Gauging students' content understanding in real time was another common issue, selected by three teachers. Finally, two teachers noted difficulties in simplifying content for diverse learners. This chart illustrates that variability in student readiness and limited time are primary obstacles in promoting content understanding.

Ensuring students grasp content in a bilingual setting

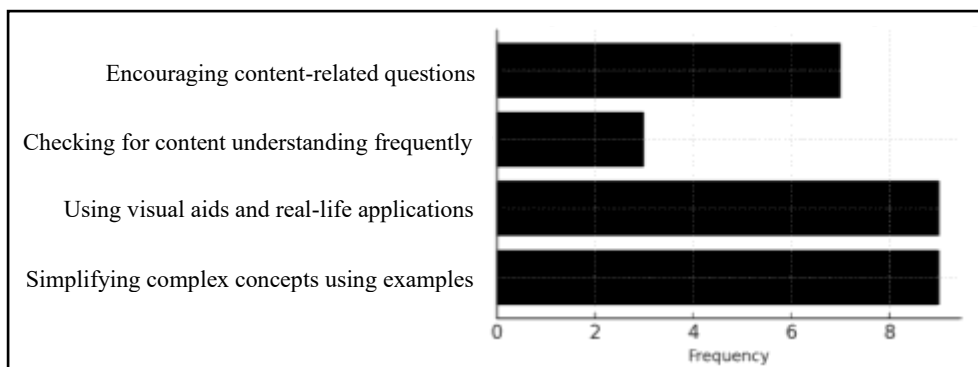


Figure 4.2: Ensuring students grasp content in a bilingual setting

All ten teachers provided responses on their methods to ensure students understand the content. Nine teachers emphasized simplifying complex concepts with examples, while nine also used visual aids and real-life applications to make concepts more relatable. Three teachers checked content understanding frequently, and seven encouraged students to ask content-related questions. The chart indicates a high reliance on simplification and visual aids, showing teachers prioritize clarity and accessibility to bridge content gaps in a bilingual setting.

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Addressing student struggles with content understanding

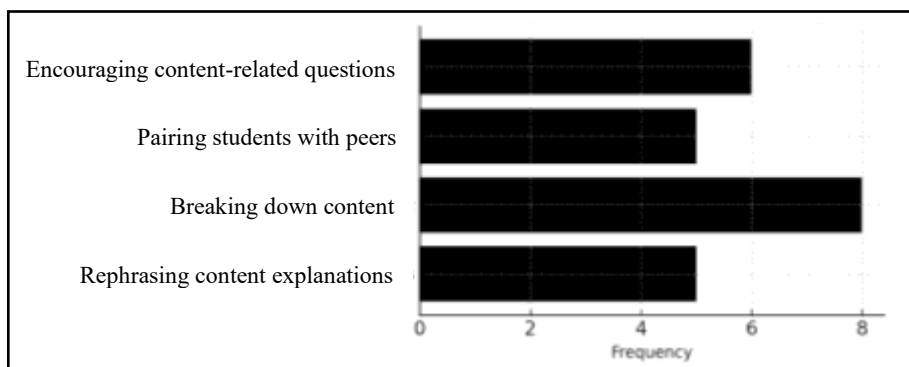


Figure 4.3: Addressing student struggles with content understanding

This chart explores strategies teachers use when students struggle with content. Eight teachers reported breaking down content into smaller, more manageable parts as their primary approach. Five teachers selected rephrasing content explanations, while five mentioned pairing students with peers for content support. Six teachers encouraged students to ask questions when they encountered difficulties. This chart emphasizes that teachers value step-by-step explanations and peer support to enhance comprehension.

Managing subject-specific vocabulary complexity

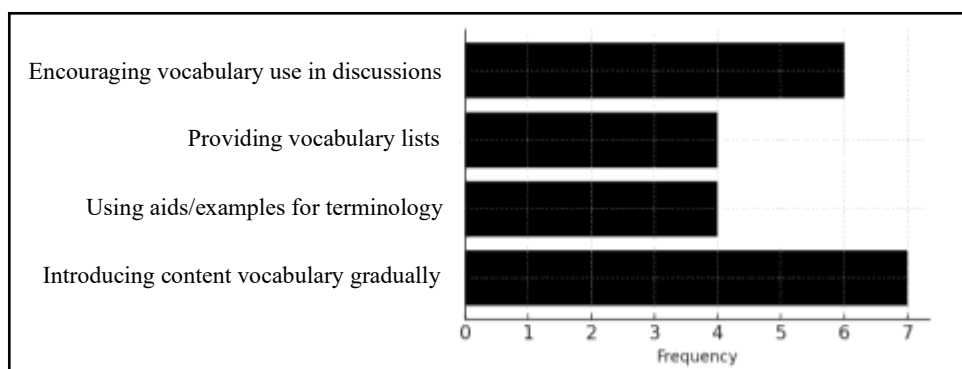


Figure 4.4: Managing subject-specific vocabulary complexity

In addressing vocabulary challenges, seven teachers indicated that they gradually introduced content-specific vocabulary to avoid overwhelming students. Four teachers used visual aids or examples to help students grasp new terminology, while four provided vocabulary lists with definitions to support learning. Six teachers encouraged students to incorporate new vocabulary into discussions. This chart suggests that a phased vocabulary introduction and reinforcement through practice are core strategies for managing terminology in bilingual classrooms.

Main challenges in promoting language development through teacher talk

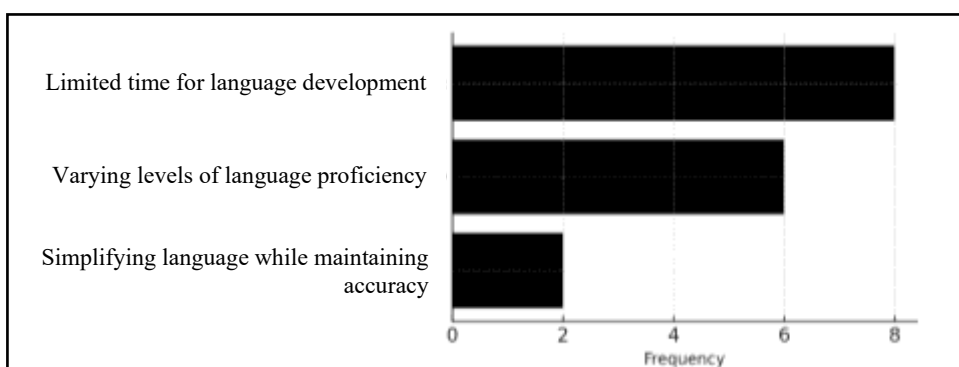


Figure 4.5: Main challenges in promoting language development through teacher talk

Challenges faced by content teachers in using teacher talk to promote language and content development and the strategies they employ

Language development poses specific challenges; eight teachers pointed to the limited time for focusing on language within content lessons as a primary challenge. Six teachers noted the varying language proficiency levels among students, while two struggled to simplify language without losing accuracy. The chart reflects a common theme where teachers feel constrained by time and student diversity in language proficiency, indicating a need for additional support or time allocation for language development.

Ensuring language skill development while teaching content

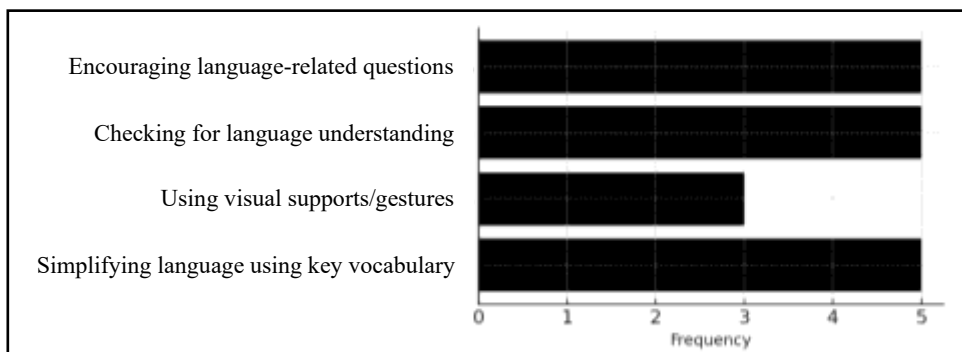


Figure 4.6: Ensuring language skill development while teaching content

This chart highlights approaches to promoting language skills, with five teachers simplifying language and using key vocabulary to make lessons more understandable. Four teachers incorporated visual aids and gestures to aid language comprehension. Five teachers frequently checked for language understanding, while five also encouraged language-related questions. Teachers here rely on simplified language and frequent checks to support language development alongside content.

Handling student struggles with language of instruction

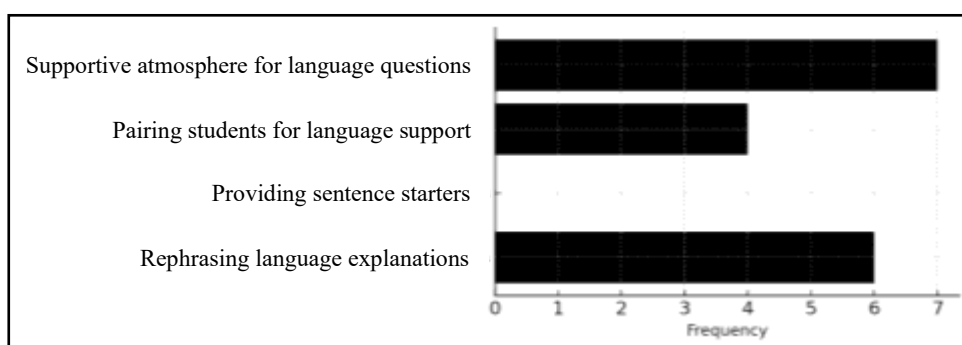


Figure 4.7: Handling student struggles with language of instruction

When dealing with language difficulties, six teachers rephrased explanations to make language accessible, and four paired students with peers to offer language support. Seven teachers created a supportive environment to encourage students to ask language-related questions. The chart shows that rephrasing, pairing, and fostering a supportive atmosphere are essential tools in tackling language struggles, creating a setting where students feel comfortable seeking help.

Scaffolding complex language concepts

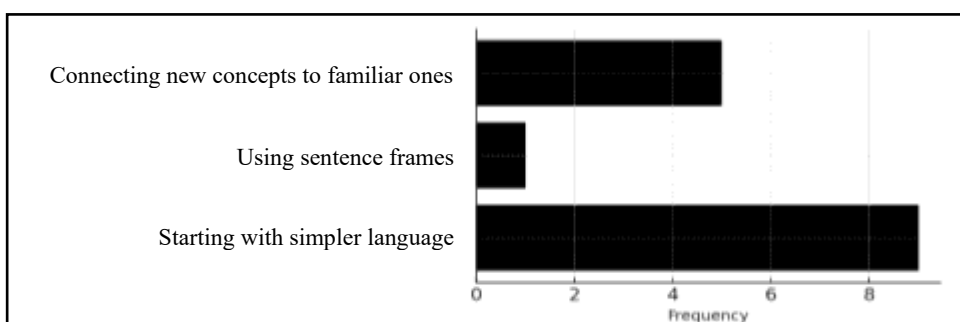


Figure 4.8: Scaffolding complex language concepts

Challenges faced by content teachers in using teacher talk to promote language and content development and the strategies they employ

For scaffolding, nine teachers started with simpler language and gradually increased complexity, showing a unanimous strategy for scaffolding language. Five teachers connected new language concepts to familiar ones to bridge understanding gaps, while only one used sentence frames or language prompts. The chart demonstrates that incremental complexity and familiarity with language structure are effective strategies teachers use to guide students through difficult language concepts.

Providing feedback on students' language use

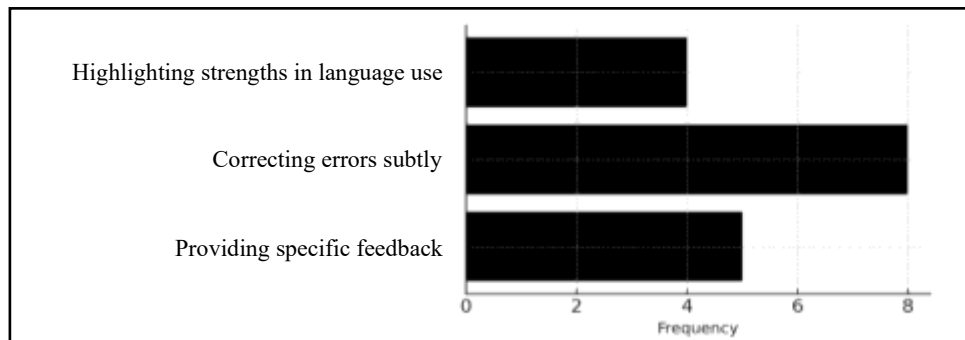


Figure 4.9: Providing feedback on students' language use

Teachers' feedback strategies included giving specific language feedback, with five teachers selecting this option. Eight teachers corrected errors subtly to avoid interrupting the lesson flow, and four highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement in students' language use. The chart indicates that teachers aim for constructive feedback that respects the lesson's pace and students' confidence, balancing encouragement with correction.

Challenges in correcting language errors without interrupting content learning

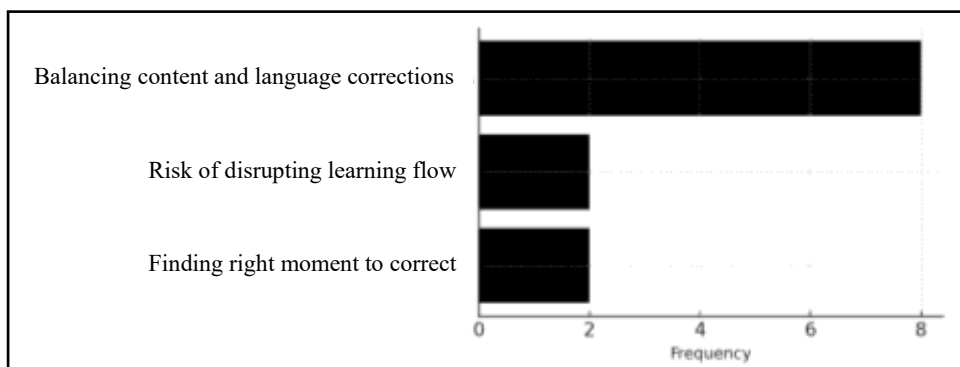


Figure 4.10: Challenges in correcting errors without interrupting content learning

The challenge of balancing language and content corrections was selected by eight teachers, emphasizing its importance. Two teachers struggled with finding the right moment to correct language without disrupting learning and same like those two teachers noted the risk of interrupting content learning while addressing language errors. This chart underscores that timing and discretion are critical in managing language corrections without losing focus on content.

Challenges in adapting teacher talk for varying language proficiency levels

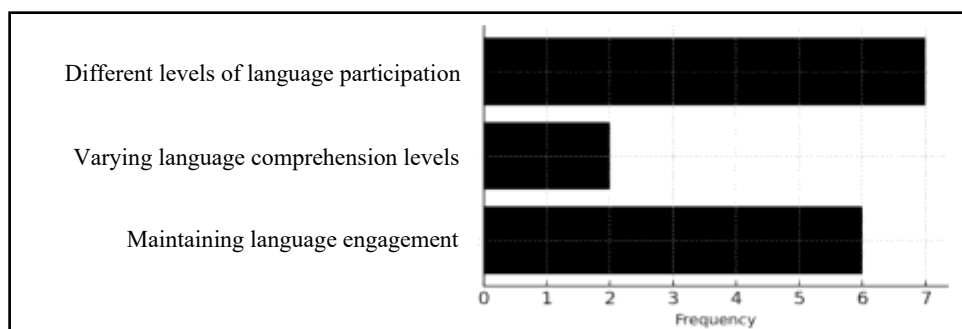


Figure 4.11: Challenges in adapting teacher talk for varying language proficiency levels

Challenges faced by content teachers in using teacher talk to promote language and content development and the strategies they employ

Teachers reported challenges in keeping students engaged at different proficiency levels; six teachers noted difficulty maintaining engagement among all students. Two teachers mentioned the issue of varying comprehension levels during discussions, and seven highlighted challenges in promoting equal language participation. This chart suggests that diverse language skills make it hard for teachers to balance inclusivity, with engagement and comprehension varying significantly across students.

In conclusion, the analysis of teacher talk in bilingual classrooms highlights a range of challenges that content teachers face in promoting both content and language development. Teachers struggle primarily with varying levels of students' prior knowledge, making it challenging to maintain a consistent teaching pace. Time constraints further complicate efforts to balance individualized support and curriculum goals, often limiting the opportunity to address students' language needs alongside content learning. This study shows that teachers use strategies like simplifying concepts, using visual aids, and breaking down content to aid understanding.

Moreover, while teachers implement methods such as gradual vocabulary introduction and error correction, the limited use of structured tools like sentence frames or multimodal supports suggests gaps in systematic language support, which could benefit bilingual students. Effective feedback practices, along with a supportive classroom environment, have also been identified as essential but underutilized tools for fostering language growth.

Overall, the findings highlight the complex balance teachers must maintain in bilingual education, constantly adapting to language barriers, varying skill levels, and content understanding. The insights gathered from this study emphasize the need for expanded, nuanced strategies and structured scaffolding in teacher talk to improve bilingual education outcomes. These conclusions can inform targeted interventions to enhance teacher training and classroom practices, contributing to a more inclusive and effective bilingual education framework in the Ampara District.

V. DISCUSSION

One of the key challenges identified in this study was the varying levels of prior knowledge among students, which significantly affected the teaching pace and content delivery. In bilingual classrooms, teachers often face the difficulty of addressing a wide range of academic backgrounds, with some students possessing a strong foundational understanding while others lag behind. This variability forces teachers to constantly adjust their teaching strategies, revisiting basic concepts for less-prepared students while trying to maintain the engagement of more advanced learners. This aligns with Gibbons (2015) and Cummins (2000), who emphasize the challenges of catering to diverse levels of student preparedness in bilingual education. The Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) framework, as proposed by Cummins (2000), further explains that the cognitive load of academic content in a second language can exacerbate these disparities, making it more difficult for teachers to deliver complex material uniformly across the classroom.

Moreover, Lucas and Villegas (2011) highlight that teachers in bilingual settings often face time constraints, struggling to balance the dual goals of content mastery and language development. In this study, limited time to cover all required content emerged as a common issue for many teachers, leaving little room to provide individualized support to students with varying needs. Gibbons (2015) also acknowledges this time pressure, noting that while it is necessary to simplify content for diverse learners, doing so is often time-consuming and can detract from other instructional goals.

To address these challenges, the most common strategies employed by teachers in this study to promote content understanding were simplifying complex concepts and using visual aids, with nearly all participants reporting the use of these methods. Simplifying concepts allows teachers to present material in more digestible chunks, making it easier for students to grasp challenging content. This is consistent with Gibbons (2002), who advocates for scaffolding as a critical method for bridging gaps between students' prior knowledge and the new concepts being introduced. By breaking down content, teachers are able to build on students' existing knowledge incrementally, supporting more effective learning outcomes.

However, while simplification is necessary, it carries the risk of oversimplifying material, which can lead to a reduction in content complexity. Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2017) raise this concern in their Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, where they stress the importance of maintaining content integrity while adapting it for language learners. In this study, although simplification was a common strategy, frequent comprehension checks were reported by only a few teachers, which could result in gaps in student understanding. Research by Echevarria et al. (2017) highlights the importance of regularly checking for comprehension, particularly in bilingual settings, where language barriers can obscure students' true understanding of the material.

Another commonly used strategy was the use of visual aids, which helps in making abstract concepts more concrete and accessible for students. This reliance on visual aids is supported by Schleppegrell (2004), who emphasizes their value in easing the cognitive load for second-language learners. Visual supports not only enhance content understanding but also aid language comprehension, as they provide non-verbal cues that help students process new information more efficiently.

When it comes to language development, this study identified two main challenges: the wide range of language proficiency levels and the limited time available to focus on language instruction. With bilingual classrooms comprising students at varying levels of

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language ability, teachers often struggle to provide adequate support to all learners. This challenge is mirrored in the findings of García and Kleifgen (2018), who discuss the difficulty of catering to diverse language needs in bilingual settings. The gap between higher- and lower-proficiency students can hinder consistent engagement and equitable participation, requiring teachers to balance between simplified instruction for lower-proficiency students and more complex language for advanced learners.

Additionally, Hammond (2006) explains that time constraints in bilingual classrooms often lead to a prioritization of content over language development. This was evident in this study, where teachers found it difficult to focus on language development within the limited instructional time available. The struggle to simplify teacher talk while maintaining the complexity of the subject matter is also noted by Swain (2000), who emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensible input to support language acquisition. Teachers in this study reported difficulties in simplifying language without losing content accuracy, a delicate balance that is key to successful bilingual education.

To promote language development, teachers employed strategies such as simplifying language, focusing on key vocabulary, and checking for language understanding. These strategies align with Swain's (2000) perspective that modifying teacher talk is essential to ensure that students can comprehend both the language and content of lessons. Teachers who adapt their language to the proficiency levels of their students help provide comprehensible input, which is critical for language acquisition. However, this study found that teachers underutilized multimodal strategies, such as gestures and visual supports, which could further assist students in processing language. Echevarria et al. (2017) also highlight the importance of these multimodal strategies, noting that they can make both content and language more accessible for bilingual learners by reinforcing verbal explanations with non-verbal cues.

In conclusion, the findings of this study align with a broader body of literature, which underscores the complexities that content teachers face in bilingual classrooms. Teachers are constantly balancing the need to deliver academic content while simultaneously fostering language development, all within the constraints of limited time and diverse student needs. The challenges and strategies highlighted in this study mirror those in existing research, pointing to the need for expanded scaffolding and more structured support systems in teacher talk to effectively address the dual goals of content mastery and language development. Expanding the use of multimodal supports and ensuring more frequent comprehension checks are areas where future interventions could enhance bilingual teaching practices.

A. Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the role of item difficulty and discrimination in language testing. For instance, Alderson (2000) emphasizes the importance of using a range of item difficulties to ensure that a test is appropriately challenging for all students. The distribution of easy, moderate, and difficult items in this study aligns with his recommendation that around 60% of test items should fall within the moderate difficulty range, as this provides a fair assessment for students of varying proficiency levels. In this study, 52% of the items were classified as moderate, which is close to the optimal balance suggested by Alderson.

In terms of item discrimination, Buck (2001) highlights the importance of items that can effectively differentiate between high and low performers, particularly in listening comprehension tests. He argues that items with high discrimination indices are essential for ensuring that a test accurately reflects students' abilities. The fact that 72% of the items in this study demonstrated good to very good discrimination aligns with Buck's findings, suggesting that the test performed well in distinguishing between strong and weak students.

However, this study also found that a subset of items (28%) had fair or poor discrimination indices, which mirrors findings from previous research. According to Henning (1987), items with low discrimination indices may fail to provide useful information about students' abilities, as they do not differentiate between high and low performers effectively. This is particularly true for items that are either too easy or too difficult, as they tend to produce similar results across different ability levels (Brown, 2012). The presence of such items in this study underscores the need for careful item review and revision to ensure that all test items contribute meaningfully to the assessment of students' listening comprehension skills.

C. Significance of the Study

Despite these limitations, the study makes important contributions to the field of bilingual education in Sri Lanka. First, it sheds light on the practical challenges content teachers face in balancing content delivery and language development. This is particularly significant because much of the existing research on bilingual education in Sri Lanka has focused on policy implementation or student outcomes, rather than the communicative practices of teachers (Jayaweera, 2014; Perera, 2020).

Second, the study highlights the strategies teachers employ in real classroom settings, such as simplification, scaffolding, and peer support. These strategies, though modest, illustrate how teachers adapt their talk to meet the dual demands of content and language instruction. Documenting such practices adds to the international literature on teacher talk and classroom discourse, where studies often emphasize CLIL or EFL contexts in Europe and Asia but overlook under-researched contexts such as Sri Lanka (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011).

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Third, the study's findings hold practical significance for teacher training and professional development. By identifying gaps, such as lack of training and time constraints the research provides evidence-based insights for policymakers and educational leaders to design targeted interventions. Training programs that integrate subject content with language pedagogy could strengthen the capacity of bilingual teachers and improve student outcomes.

D. Implications

Teachers can draw on the study's findings to refine their use of teacher talk. For example, strategies such as rephrasing, using visual aids, and scaffolding can be systematically incorporated into lesson planning. Teachers may also be encouraged to engage in reflective practices, analyzing their own discourse to ensure that it promotes both content mastery and language development (Walsh, 2011).

The study underscores the urgent need for professional development programs tailored for content teachers in bilingual settings. Teacher training initiatives should focus on equipping educators with practical strategies for integrating language support into subject teaching. This aligns with García and Kleifgen's (2018) argument that content teachers must be prepared as language teachers in order to meet the needs of emergent bilinguals.

At the policy level, the study implies that greater support must be given to bilingual teachers through resources, time allocation, and continuous professional training. The lack of structured support for teacher talk in bilingual classrooms highlights a gap in Sri Lanka's bilingual education policy, which tends to emphasize access to English without providing sufficient scaffolding for teachers (Perera, 2020). Policymakers should integrate teacher talk strategies into curriculum guidelines and teacher training frameworks to strengthen the bilingual program.

H. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the limitations and findings, several avenues for future research are suggested:

Future studies should include a larger sample of teachers across multiple schools and districts. This would provide a more representative picture of the challenges and strategies associated with teacher talk in Sri Lanka's bilingual education system.

To capture the complexity of classroom discourse, future research should include classroom observations, interviews, or discourse analysis. Such methods would provide richer insights into how teacher talk unfolds in real-time and how students respond (Chaudron, 1988).

Future studies should investigate how students perceive teacher talk and evaluate its effectiveness in supporting their learning. This would provide a more balanced view of teacher-student interaction and help align teacher strategies with student needs (Swain, 2000).

Since vocabulary and discourse conventions vary across disciplines (e.g., Science vs. Geography), research should explore how teacher talk differs across subjects. This would inform subject-specific training for bilingual teachers (Schleppegrell, 2004).

Long-term studies could examine how teacher talk strategies influence both language proficiency and content mastery over time. Such research could track the effectiveness of interventions or training programs designed to enhance teacher talk practices.

By addressing these areas, future research can build on the present study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher talk in bilingual classrooms and contribute to the ongoing improvement of Sri Lanka's bilingual education program.

This study explored the challenges content teachers face in using teacher talk to promote both language and content development in bilingual classrooms, alongside the strategies they employ. Findings revealed key difficulties such as balancing content with language support, managing subject-specific vocabulary, limited instructional time, and lack of training. Teachers responded with strategies including simplification, scaffolding, visuals, and peer support. These insights underscore the critical role of teacher talk in bilingual education and highlight the need for targeted professional development and policy interventions to strengthen teaching practices and improve student outcomes in Sri Lanka.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study identified significant challenges content teachers face in bilingual classrooms, highlighting areas where additional support and resources are needed. One of the main challenges is managing students' varied language proficiency levels; teachers often struggle to find a balance between simplifying language for lower-proficiency students and maintaining the academic rigor required for higher-proficiency students. Another major challenge is ensuring that students comprehend subject-specific vocabulary, as many terms in Science, Mathematics, and other subjects are complex and may not have direct translations. Teachers also face difficulty balancing instructional time between covering content and addressing language development, which is often exacerbated by the pressures of curriculum pacing and exam preparation.

These challenges reveal a need for enhanced teacher training and professional development focused on bilingual instruction. Teachers in the study expressed a desire for additional resources and practical training that would enable them to handle these dual roles more effectively. This includes training on language scaffolding techniques, strategies for differentiating instruction based on language proficiency, and methods for integrating language and content learning objectives. Such support could empower

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content teachers to manage the demands of bilingual classrooms more confidently, ultimately improving educational outcomes for bilingual students. These findings highlight the importance of further investment in teacher preparation programs to address the unique demands of bilingual education in regions like the Ampara District.

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