A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION IN BHUTAN

Mark LaPrairie
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the implementation of the policy for English-medium education in government-run schools in Bhutan, a small multilingual developing country in the eastern Himalayas. It identifies factors influencing its effective implementation, plus policy and practice measures to improve learning outcomes for students. It takes as a theoretic framework an approach known as ‘content and language integrated learning’ (CLIL). This involves integration of language and subject teaching.

The study addresses the following research question: How can implementation of Bhutan’s policy of English-medium education be enhanced? Data to address these questions were gathered through a literature review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. The study also draws on personal experience.

The findings reveal that implementation of Bhutan’s policy of English-medium government-run education could be significantly enhanced. Students are not attaining control over English at desired levels of schooling; classroom practices favour didactic teaching-learning approaches; teachers’ tend to teach toward terminal examinations and adhere to traditional teacher and student roles; and subject teachers do not consistently support students’ English language development. The study also found that many stakeholders, including policy-makers, teachers, curriculum developers and teacher trainers lack awareness of the concept of language-related disadvantage in education and approaches for more effective second language-medium teaching and learning. This includes a lack of language-sensitive classroom practices in both language and subject classes.

These findings highlight the need for teachers to make different methodological choices inside classrooms. To do this, teachers should become skilled and confident in the use of classroom practices which support students’ English language learning. Key stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, teachers and teacher educators, must understand and accept the need for further policy and practice measures to support language-sensitive teaching-learning approaches for English-medium education in Bhutan. The implications of these findings for policy, practice and future research are further elucidated.