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ENHANCING QUESTIONING SKILLS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN CONDUCTING CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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Questioning is key in the teaching - learning process. It is a widely used technique of teaching throughout the world. There are several advantages of using questions and therefore it is essential for teachers to be competent in this respect, in the classroom. According to the education reforms introduced in 1997, the primary cycle has been divided into three key stages: key stage one - grades 1 and 2, key stage two - grades 3 and 4 and key stage three - grade 5. The primary curriculum consists of four main subject areas; first language, mathematics, environment related activities (ERA) and religion (Primary Education Planning Project, 2000). Environment related activities is an integrated subject newly introduced to the primary curriculum. The aim of this study is to enhance questioning skill of primary teachers in conducting activities in teaching ERA at key stage one.

This study was conducted in three phases; identifying weakness in questioning, planning lessons for conducting activities and implementing prepared lessons. Data were collected using questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. During the first phase of the study ten primary classrooms were observed selecting three schools from the Kegalle district. Questionnaires were administered to 50 primary teachers and interviews were conducted with 25 teachers. Data obtained from above three sources were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Use of yes/no questions, ambiguous questions, very complex questions and suggestive questions were identified as weaknesses in questioning. There were several instances where children were not given sufficient time to answer questions. It was evident from classroom observation that teachers lack understanding regarding the wait-time of a question. It was also revealed that not a single teacher had paid attention to questions when planning activities and writing lesson plans. The use of closed-ended questions in the classroom resulted in passive participation of students in the first phase when engaging in activities. However, teachers were really concerned about the questions they asked in each step of activities as a result of fruitful discussions in the second phase of the study. The use of open-ended questions in the classroom motivated students to be actively engaged in activities.