Teaching science in multilingual contexts: an exploratory study into the experiences and insights of Maltese science teachers as they learn about teaching in multilingual scenarios

# Details

## Year

2020

## DOI

10.1080/09500693.2020.1725173

## Issued

2020

## Language

English

## Volume

42

## Issue

14

## Start Page

## End Page

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## Type

Journal article

## Journal

International Journal of Science Education

## Publisher

Informa UK Limited

## Sample

13 Science teachers who teach multicultural classrooms in Malta.

## Implications For Educators About

# Abstract

In Malta, Maltese and English are learnt in school from age five.During Science lessons, teachers and learners normally use Maltese to talk about key concepts yet the written medium of instruction is English. This has been the practice adopted in Science classrooms for many years. The influx of migrants in recent years has yielded a multilingual classroom scenario that is relatively new to Maltese teachers. This change constitutes a challenge for teachers and students as a good number of these migrant learners are not familiar with these languages so there is no language of instruction that can support good communication. This paper will probe into Maltese teachers’ experiences and insights as they learn about how they can teach Science in such a scenario. Through teachers’ interviews, it will probe into how teachers engage in teaching Science to classes that include multilingual learners. The strategies that these teachers have used during the past few years in order to cope with the situation that has developed will be presented and discussed.

# Outcome

The language barrier between the migrant student and teacher is blocking the students’ learning processes. Teachers have attempted to make use of electronic translation devices, but scientific word translations may be inaccurate. Students may find it hard to find an equivalent word in their language. Science teachers who teach multicultural classrooms in Malta make use of technology, such as the interactive white board, visual artefacts (eg. pictures and videos), and the internet as resources to address the specific needs of migrant learners. These resources benefit the migrant and local learners.