Policies on MLE and teacher training for MLE in Sri Lanka

By Manori Ramya Mahabodhi

Sri Lanka is a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural country where two major linguistic communities, Sinhala and Tamil, use their languages freely in communication and for official purposes. These two languages are taught as national languages to children of the relevant linguistic community. And all the children learn the language of the other linguistic community as the Second National Language (2NL). English Language is also taught for all as a Second Language. All the children are given the opportunity for their primary and secondary education to be completed in the medium of their respective national language. And they have a choice in secondary education to select English as the medium of instruction.

Sri Lanka has reached a literacy rate of 92 percent, an enrolment rate of 97.2 percent, and have 98 percent finishing primary school, setting an example for other counties in the region. A brief account of favorable multilingual education (MLE) policies and how far these policies agree with the recommendation of UNESCO regarding the use of local languages in learning and providing access global language of communication through education will be presented.

The paper discusses the selection procedure, pedagogy, strength, and challenges in a MTB-MLE teacher education program implemented in the National Colleges of Education, where preservice teacher training is given in a multilanguage learning environment. Good practices and suggestions to improve the program that have been identified through participatory observations and discussions with relevant groups will be presented.

The Ten Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka (2012 – 2022) will be stated in closing.