Towards a pluralistic society: MTB-MLE practices in Sri Lanka

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This paper represents an attempt to find if the Sri Lankan government policy of providing mother tongue-based bilingual education to promote pluralism has been successful in the secondary school education system. The present practice is to place both monolingual (ML) and bilingual (BL) students together in the same classroom to promote harmony and multicultural understanding. Through use of language and learning policies, the policy planners aim to avoid creating an elite class within the school community. This was the background for the research problem.

The research was conducted in 21 selected schools with similar learning opportunities in both urban and rural settings, covering almost all the provinces of Sri Lanka. Teachers of the relevant classes, parents, and teacher educators/trainers were interviewed about their observations regarding the cooperation between and attitudes among the two groups (ML and BL) in formal learning and outside-of-class contexts.

According to the data, in 98 percent of the sample from a mix of the two groups, attitudes of tolerance towards different cultures has improved. However, in a few schools where BL students are a large majority of a class, ML students are marginalized and animosity between the two groups is still perceived. However, as a whole, the present practice has been successful in achieving pluralism through MTB-MLE.