Towards a Pluralistic Society: Sri Lankan Practices in MTB-MLE

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A research to find

if the government policy of Sri Lanka providing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education to promote pluralism has been successfully practised in the secondary school education system.

The aim of the policy planners to avoid creating an elite class within the school community through language and learning policies was the basis of the research problem.
Introduction

• Sri Lanka has a long history of MLE practices which dates back to the 3rd Century BC (Deraniyagala, 1996) and which was closely linked with Buddhist religious establishments like Pirivena or temples up to the early 20th Century AD. Sinhala, Pali, and Sanskrit were the languages taught and media of instruction in teaching Buddhism, astrology, indigenous medicine.

• After colonization, the hegemony of Pirivena education was shifted to missionary establishments of English medium education which took supremacy over vernacular education resulting in the emergence of an elite class through linguistic capital.
In 1941 all the schools were vested to the government and the instructional medium of primary education was made L1 while English was made a compulsory L2 from grade 3.

Through the language policy of the government, during the 1960s the medium of instruction was made L1 up to the tertiary level.

In 2001 through the circular of Ministry of Education, English medium education was reintroduced into G.C.E.A/L science subjects.

**Constraints**

- Forbade EM classes at primary level.
- Taught selected subjects in English from grade 5 – 11. (MoE Circular 2003/ 18)
The turning point in BE in Sri Lanka
MoE circular 2008.4.21

“The implementation of the new syllabus in grades vi - xi”

• To promote English through teaching selected subjects in English **without devaluing the status of the two national languages.**
• To bring about an attitudinal change among people.
• To turn English into a tool available for all.
• To encourage communication among students through the use of two languages and thereby to advance cognitive development.

• **Official identification of BE**
• **Realizing the theoretical and scientific value behind BE**
• Additive bilingualism promotes all students to be both bilingual and biliterate, and if successful, to gain the expected level of standards in $L_2$, develops healthy cross-cultural attitudes. (Johnson, 2001, Christian, Montona, Lindholm, and Carranza, 1997) ...

• … provided that the child’s environment sets value on both cultures, recognizing dual identity in both. (Christian, Montona, Lindholm, and Carranza, 1997)
• Lambert, (1990), after studies of elementary and high school students in French immersion programs in Quebec points out that this experience in L2 and its culture enriches pupils’ ‘social perspectives’ and enhances their ‘realm of’ ideology regarding ‘intergroup coexistence’.

• Further, it says that language learning can take place in non-language arts subjects, with content transferred only in the target language.

• The most effective policy for achieving the intellectual capacities of all children is based on promoting dual language education, as in Canada and other countries. (Baker, 1996)

• The earlier, the best to start 2-way bilingual approach. (Genesee, 1987)
Methodology

➢ A horizontal and qualitative study analyzed quantitatively.
➢ Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders.
➢ Indirect observations.
➢ Interviewing the teachers of the relevant classes, parents and teacher educators/trainers on their observations made regarding the cooperation and attitudes among the two sets in formal learning and outside class contexts.

➢ 42 BE teachers
➢ 42 ME teachers of the BE subjects
➢ 42 ME teachers of other subjects
➢ 66 parents and
➢ 30 teacher trainers/Educators/Assistant Directors of Education
➢ Research carried out from 15th December 2015 to 20th March 2016
Sample for study

- BE students of grade 6 - 11 of 21 schools selected randomly from all nine provinces of Sri Lanka.
- 2 categories of BE students:
  - Students in grade 8 - BME from grade 6.
  - Students in grade 11 – BME only from grade 9
- Schools of both urban, semi-urban, and rural settings with similar learning opportunities.
- Heterogeneous classrooms of boys, girls, and mixed.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperation among BE &amp; ME students</th>
<th>Attitudes towards one another</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In group/ pair work</td>
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<td>In other cocurricular activities in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside the classroom in play area &amp; canteen</td>
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<td>In extra-curricular activities</td>
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<td>Outside school</td>
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Data Analysis: Cooperation Among BE and ME Students (as observed by BE teachers)

- in group/ pair work
- outside classroom

- in other co-curricular activities
- outside school
Attitudes Towards One Another
(as observed by BE teachers)

• In group/ pair work

- Outside classroom

- In other co-curricular activities

- Outside school
Findings

• In 98% of the sample, after mixing the two sets, their attitudes were seen to be positively improved regarding tolerating different cultures.

• However, in a few schools where the BL students are the great majority in the class, marginalization of ML students and animosity between the two are still noticeable.

• In those schools, this animosity prevails especially among girls of higher grades (Grade 11).
• 89% ME subject teachers find no issue in classroom management or in the rapport in between them.
• Nearly 50% of BE teachers don’t like this approach due to practical issues.
• 95% ME teachers of same BE subjects in BE classes don’t like it either due to similar problems.
• 72% of parents, especially mothers don’t like this mix.
Reasons for the objections to BM classes

BE teachers and parents

- Be students need more facilities for the activities on both HOTS and LOTS.
- Both context embedded and context reduced activities can be practised better in separate BE classrooms.
- Need separate classrooms to avoid outside disturbances.

Other teachers

- Have to waste time when shifting to another class for the particular subject.
Conclusion

• As a whole, the present practice has been successful in achieving pluralism thorough MTB-MLE.

• However, conversion of EME into BME from a later grade than grade 6 has created difficulties for girls especially in both sets in adjusting to the new setting. ( A point for further study)

• BME from grade 6, i.e. from the beginning, promotes healthy cross-cultural attitudes as the classroom/learning environment, sets value on both cultures as Christian, Montona, Lindholm, and Carranza, (1997) highlight.
• On the other hand, as Meddawattegedara, (2015) says, elitism related to English is still visible, but only in some cases.

• The young learners are especially devoid of this superiority complex which has family roots.

• The majority of the BE teachers and ME teachers of the same subjects are not content of this approach.
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Thank You!