

Current Status of Bilingual Education in Public Schools

With Special Reference to Matugama Education Zone

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The process of teaching English in Sri Lanka has a long history and it goes back to the period of colonizer who invaded the island. However, many researchers have found that there is a continuation of poor performance in English at the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) Examination. Karunaratne (2003) states that many researchers have found out the fact that only a minority of school population succeeds in achieving the required level of proficiency at the GCE O/L examination in relation to the English Language. In addition, Perera (2010) mentions student heterogeneity as a causative factor for the poor performance in English. However, to overcome this continuous issue of poor performance in English the Ministry of education has been introducing various programmes. One of them introduced in 2003 is the programme of Bilingual Education. Here, from grade six to grade eleven, some subjects are taught in English and the rest in Sinhala/Tamil. Neranjani (2013) states that the performance of bilingual students is generally high in all subjects but this opportunity is available only for a small percentage of students in a few selected urban schools. Kularathne (2014) mentions that even after ten years of this programme only in 9.3% schools in Sri Lanka it has been implemented. In Matugama education zone only in 0.34% schools the programme is being implemented and the bilingual student population is 2%. However, this small population is not sufficient to achieve the expected goal of the programme; according to the National Education Commission (2003), is to enable all students to acquire proficiency in second language facilitating them to pursue higher education and to achieve career advancements. This study tries to explore the current status of implementation and practice of bilingual education programme in Matugama education zone.

The specific objectives:

- To identify socioeconomic and demographic factors that affect the students to select the bilingual stream
- To identify the problems faced by bilingual students
- To study population statistics of bilingual students and bilingual teachers
- To find out the advantages of BE
- To suggest measures to improve bilingual education in Matugama Education Zone

Research Methodology

Using the survey method, this study uses two questionnaires to collect primary quantitative data from the entire population of the bilingual students and the bilingual teachers in the zone. In addition, there are ten structured interviews for ten parents of current bilingual students and those who have completed Bilingual education from grade six to grade eleven. Moreover, five interviews from the bilingual students and five interviews from the bilingual teachers are held to representing each school where there is bilingual education. Thus, qualitative data are collected. The scheduled period for data collection is a month from 20th July to 20th August. Analysis of data has been done through SPSS / Excel. Presentation of data has been done by means of table and graphs. For qualitative data quotations of expressions of teachers and parents are used.

The initial findings of the analysis of data reveal that 80% of teachers are below forty six years. The portion of bilingual female teachers can cover 68% of the total population and 80% of the bilingual teachers has studied in English or English – Sinhala bilingual media in the university or in the training institute. The portion which has got at least four year experience in the bilingual classroom is 5% .

Table 1.1 Distribution of bilingual students by schools in 2015

School No.	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade10	Grade 11
No.1	40	41	27	35	36	26
No.2	17	24	38	38	20	-
No.3	09	13	04	02	01	-
No.4	02	10	15	17	-	-
No.5	-	01	-	-	-	-

Source:- Survey 2015

The three urban schools maintain the bilingual education properly but two rural schools have problems in implementation due to lack of teacher confidence and the will of the students. Therefore, to spread bilingual education both awareness programmes for parents and continuous teacher training programmes are essential as this is a new programme in Matugama education zone.

Key words: Bilingual education

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