



Young Voices and Attitudes: An Exploratory Study on Bilingual Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The introduction of bilingual education into the Sri Lankan education system is a turning point in the history of language education which offered students a plenty of opportunities. Since the students are a central part of the education system, it is important to take an insight in to the students' perceptions to the introduction of bilingual education programme into the education system. Thus, the focus of this study was to explore the students' attitudes towards bilingual education considering students' gender and ethnicity. Accordingly, the sample of the study included a purposive sample of students studying in national schools in central urban settings and the study employed a qualitative approach to data analysis using semi-structured interviews and non-participatory observations. One of the key findings that was explored in the study was the prejudices, biases and discriminations rooted in students which account for the perpetuation of linguistic and social divisions in their school settings. Further, the study concluded two facets of bilingual education; positive and negative. The positive aspect revealed numerous aspects of learner autonomy practiced by students in the bilingual education program which they have been a part of, coupled with their exposure to the culture linked with English language. The negative aspect revealed the influence of bilingual education in nurturing negative values in students. These included disrespect to their teachers and adults, degrading their peers in the monolingual stream and a plenty of ill-behaviours. Accordingly, the analysis revealed a considerable disparity between bilingual education policy and practice demanding an immediate re-visit on policies on bilingual education.

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1. Introduction

Language is central to human survival and development both as individuals and as a society. Thus, the competence in language is essential to function in the society and to develop one's thought. Therefore, at present language learning has become a vital part in the school curriculum. In addition, bilingual and multilingual speakers are highly appreciated over monolingual speakers in the world as a consequence of their linguistic capital. With this notion of bilingualism and multilingualism coming into being, there occurred strata in the society, as bilinguals and multilinguals were given a prominent identity in the social space. In fact, this led language to associate with power hierarchies. Accordingly, the introduction of Bilingual Education program into the Sri Lankan education system is a collective effort taken by the Ministry of Education along with the other stake holders to promote bilingualism and biliteracy to offer every student with equal opportunities irrespective of socio economic and cultural disparities in order to make them competent and confident to take up both local and global challenges.

According to the National Education Commission Report (2003) ^[34], at the initial stage of the implementation of bilingual education program it has been reported that there were conflicts and disputes among the students in the two medium of instruction; bilingual and monolingual.

It was also reported that the students in the bilingual education program considered themselves superior due to the perceived elitist nature of English language in the country (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46]. As a consequence, the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders decided not to have separate classes for English Medium Instruction students. This brought a new policy proposal stating that English medium instruction and Mother tongue instruction students should be mingled in classrooms to avoid conflicts that occur basically due to attitudinal dimensions among students in the two medium of instruction (National Education Commission, 2003) ^[34]. Since Bilingual education is considered as a turning point in the history of Sri Lankan education system which brought out a plenty of opportunities for students from different ethnicities and social backgrounds thus offering equal access to linguistic capital, this research study aims to find out the perceptions of students to the introduction of bilingual education programme into the Sri Lankan education system.

The researcher's first intention was to analyze the policy on bilingual education. According to the reports of National Education Commission and the National Institute of Education and the discussions made with the policy makers and developers, it was proved that the primary objective of the bilingual education was the establishment of inclusivity and equity among the students along with the other positive traits irrespective of social class, ethnicity, language, economic status, sexual orientation and ability, to promote bilingualism and biliteracy. After a lapse of time the conversations made with the students and the observations made in the classrooms as an ESL teacher, the researcher realized that, the bilingual education has been viewed and perceived by the students in different ways. This left the researcher with the curiosity that more than equity, there can be other possible dynamics among the students. This fact grew an interest in the researcher to read literature and to investigate deep into this matter. Accordingly, the researcher being in the field as an ESL teacher, found that, though one of the primary aims of the bilingual education program was to promote equity, inclusion, bilingualism and biliteracy there can be other possible dynamics among the students rather than the above mentioned positive aspects. Therefore, the study aims to address this problem by attempting to explore students' attitudes to bilingual education.

Based on the background, the research question is: What are the general attitudes of the students in the bilingual education towards the students who follow other medium of instruction and the vice versa?

The main objective of the study is to investigate the different attitudes of students towards bilingual and monolingual education programs.

1.1. Definition of Bilingual Education

Bilingual Education is defined as "the use of two languages as the medium of instruction or the use of two languages to teach subjects other than the languages themselves". (Chimbutane citing Hornberger and Garcia). As Baker (2006) ^[5] claims, bilingual education is like "a simple label for a complex phenomenon". Although many scholars define bilingual education from different angles, most of them share common grounds in the following three aspects: school is usually the context of bilingual education; two languages are involved as teaching languages; one of the two languages should be students' first language, and the other one is

students' second language. (Chen, 2017) ^[9].

1.2. Historical overview of Bilingual Education.

According to Polanco *et al* Historical evidence directs to the existence of bilingual education programs in different parts of the world. Especially in the United States dating back to the late 1800s. The most widely implemented program was the German bilingual program, reaching more than 600,000 children by the early 20th century (Polanco *et al*, citing Ovando) According to Baker as stated by Polanco while the public supported bilingual education during that time, the political environment started shifting toward linguistic and cultural assimilation of immigrants, leading to an ideological competition between English and other languages.

Modern bilingual education programs at a national scale date back to the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) introduced by the United States Congress in 1967 as an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. BEA is one of the most critical events supporting the rights of minority language speakers. The law did not force school districts to offer bilingual programs. However, it encouraged the experimentation and use of new pedagogical techniques. (Polanco *et al* citing Crawford, 1989 and Nieto 2009). The premise of BEA was to provide a part of the instruction in the student's native language to ease the transition into mainstream English classrooms which is known as transitional bilingual education program. After BEA, the Lau v. Nichols court case 1 of 1974 led to the enactment of bilingual education rights for students in San Francisco. As a consequence, a rule was enacted by the Supreme Court declaring that schools are obligated to take sufficient steps to assist non-English speaking students to overcome linguistic barriers in the classroom.

1.3. History of language education in Sri Lanka

Taking the history of language education in Sri Lanka into account, the National Education Commission report (2016) ^[36] points out that at the very outset the education of the country was under the religious institutions. In addition to mother tongue, children were encouraged to learn classical languages such as Pali, Sanskrit and Arabic. As a consequence, Buddhist students learned Pali and Sanskrit, Hindu students Sanskrit and Muslim students Arabic. During this period education was limited to a few, predominantly upper class members. With the introduction of Pirivena education at the end of the 19th century, the education of the country took a new direction as it gave a boost to linguistic studies. Despite, English being introduced to Pirivena education it was not a compulsory subject. The colonial government introduced a school system to represent the entire island in order to replace parish schools established under Portuguese and Dutch regimes in the Maritime Provinces and missionary schools initiated by different sects of the Christian church. These missionary schools gradually developed into secular centers for education. The major aim of the government schools was to produce an English speaking community that could fill the vacant positions in non-executive jobs in the government sector. This purpose was served by the English medium schools. However, in line with this policy, colonial government established Swabasha2 schools where the medium of instruction of these schools were either Sinhala or Tamil and English was taught only if required resources were available.

After gaining independence, the government school system

developed throughout the country while missionary schools prevailed and provided a better education for those who could afford to enter them (National Education Commission, 2016)^[36]. The medium of instruction of these missionary schools was English. Accordingly, both free government schools in Swabasha medium and fee-levying schools in the English medium existed side by side by the time of independence. The free Education Act of 1947 and the government's decision to nationalize all the school in the country in the 1960s had a profound effect on the medium of instruction in schools. By the 1960s, Sinhala and Tamil became the medium of instruction in all government schools, with the increasing pressure to switch the medium of instruction in schools to the national languages. As a consequence, primary and secondary education in all government schools up to the point of university entry switched to the Swabasha medium. Therefore, students, teachers and parents considered it a privilege to be educated in the Sinhala medium and looked down upon English as a language of the colonial rulers. As a result, the attention paid to learning English declined. A direct consequence of this attitude was that many students who were products of this system of education lacked the knowledge in English to fill the higher positions in the government sector. This was a serious issue at that time. The public, the government sector and the educators began to feel the vacuum, created by the lack of qualified personnel in English. Therefore, as a result, the government initiated a number of programmes to promote English. Currently, in Sri Lanka, various programmes have been implemented to uplift the working knowledge of English among students both at the secondary and tertiary levels. Accordingly, bilingual education programmes implemented recently in some government schools is a direct result of this process and under this program some selected subjects are taught in English at the secondary level.

1.4. The importance of mother tongue in bilingual education

According to the reports of NIE, the mother tongue based bilingual education is considered as a significant aspect in bilingual education. The national objectives of mother tongue based bilingual education program in Sri Lanka are listed as follow. ("Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education." n.d.)

- To develop social harmony and social cohesion in a pluralistic society using English as a link language in local and global contexts.
- To provide opportunity for all students, irrespective of socio-economic and regional, disparities to acquire proficiency of both the first language and English without devalourization of national and official languages, Sinhala and Tamil.
- To enable students to use English as a source and means to reach knowledge society through information literacy.
- To link academic aspects with socio-economic political and cultural aspects of the world of work through national languages and the link language at local and global level.

The importance of mother tongue is often viewed by many researchers and mother tongue is seen as a prerequisite for bilingual education. According to Neville Alexander "one of the fundamental reasons for the economic failure of post-colonial Africa, South of the Arabic Zone is the fact that, with a few important exceptions, mother tongue (home language)

education is not practiced in any of the independent African states." Apart from this, Cummins in 1989 has stated that "Educators who see their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to student's repertoires are likely to empower students more than those who see their role as replacing or subtracting students' primary language and cultures in the process of assimilating them to the culture of the target language".

Fillmore (1991)^[16] claims that "when the schools do not support the maintenance of first language, the impact on the child's life away from school can be profound. As children abandon their native language, important links to family and other members of the social infrastructure are gradually weakened and lost altogether. Parents are hampered in their ability to pass on family values and cultural traditions to their children. As the nation struggles to reverse an increase in the incidence of family dissolution, schools must do more to establish or strengthen the family as a unit. Encouraging the preservation of the first language is a step in that direction". Accordingly, the students' ability in their native language must be nurtured in order to perform well in bilingual education and to establish the child's identity. Cummin's iceberg hypothesis or interdependence hypothesis explains the relationship of the first language to the learning of another language which is not someone's L1. On the surface level, learning two languages may appear as learning two discreet phenomena. But there is an interdependence between the two as the language learning skills that the learners gain by learning the first language can be transferred to when learning a second language while the vice versa of this phenomenon is also true. (Perera and Kularatne, 2014 citing Cummins)^[39].

2. Research Methodology and Sample

2.1. Data Collecting Techniques

In order to offer a systematic, reliable and a valid qualitative approach, the researcher employed semi structured interviews and non-participatory observations as data collecting techniques. Qualitative approach is considered an appropriate strategy to capture the diverse range of subjects' experiences, as "it begins with individuals and sets out to understand and interpret their experiences of a particular phenomenon" (Cohen *et al*). According to (Merriam 1998: citing Ohata)^[9] the use of interviews as a data collection tool is much appropriate in qualitative data collection as it can provide access to things that cannot be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, or beliefs. It also provides participants with opportunities to select, reconstruct, and reflect upon details of their experience within the specific context of their lives.

Since the main focus of this study was on finding out the students' attitudes to bilingual education, interviews were used as the first source of data for this study, as interviews seemed appropriate means to understand the experiences of the subjects about the bilingual education, because there is enough space for flexibility and clarification of the information. Accordingly, in addition to semi structured interviews, the other technique employed by the researcher in collecting data for this study was non-participatory observations. According to the Atlas website (2016)^[41], qualitative observational research is a type of correlational research in which a researcher observes ongoing behavior. Thus, employing non-participatory observations to collect data for this study provided the researcher with the opportunity to simply study behavior that occurs naturally

among students in junior secondary grade (6, 7) classrooms as they express themselves more in the ways they behave. Furthermore, in order to conduct observations, the researcher used an observation protocol which was adopted by Wijesekara (2018) ^[46].

In summary, this research study employed a qualitative approach which contains both semi structured interviews and non-participatory observations as data collecting tools, to offer a systematic, reliable and a valid study to answer the following research question,

1. What are the general attitudes of the students in the bilingual education towards the students who follow other medium of instruction and the vice versa?

2.2. Research Sample

Initially the researcher conducted a pilot study taking grade 6 and 7 students as the sample to collect data using observations and interviews. Subsequent to the study the researcher realized that, the transition of these students to bilingual education is too immediate for the students to participate in this study. Therefore, the researcher decided to select participants from grade 9 and 10 classes for interviews and grade 6 and 7 classes for observations. The reason behind choosing grade 6 and 7 students for observations was that, while conducting the pilot survey the researcher realized that these students express themselves genuinely and thereby the researcher intended to examine if there may be any transformations in the attitudes of the students from junior secondary classes (6, 7) to upper secondary (9, 10) classes. Accordingly, the participants chosen for the study were from grade 6, 7, 9 and 10. The participants were from a boys' school, a girls' school and a mixed school from central urban locations in the Western province and the North Western province of Sri Lanka. The researcher observed three, grade 6 and 7 classes each from the selected schools for the study. In addition, the researcher employed purposive sampling in conducting the study. Accordingly, the researcher selected school settings and the participants based on the assumption that they will enable to answer the research questions. The sample of the participants chosen for the interviews consisted of 18 participants and the composition of the participants for the study is given in the following table.

Table 1: The Composition of the Participants

18 participants	
9 males	9 females
3 Bilingual students (1 Tamil/English, 2 Sinhala/English)	3 Bilingual students (English and Sinhala)
3 Tamil Medium Students	3 Tamil students
3 Sinhala Medium Students	3 Sinhala medium students

2.3. Research Procedure

A total of eighteen interviews were conducted between November 2018 and January 2019. In conducting the interviews, the researcher used a semi-structured interview format

taking into account the above mentioned research questions under investigation. While the participation in the interviews was completely voluntary, the consent of the participants and their parents was obtained to audio record the interviews and they were informed that the confidentiality of the participants will be assured and once the transcription is done the audio recordings will be deleted adhering to the ethics, linked to research studies of this nature. The participants were allowed

to use Sinhala, English or Tamil during the interviews based on their convenience. Whenever, the students chose Tamil to face the interview, a reliable and a trustworthy person was employed to translate them either into Sinhala or English. At the beginning of each interview the participants were requested to provide a brief introduction of themselves. This primarily included their basic information. Each interview lasted for 20-25 minutes. The researcher also occasionally paraphrased the statements by the participants to ensure accuracy. (Hettiarachchi, 2013) ^[18] Consequently, attempts were made to identify possible themes and patterns, because in qualitative research, data analysis is an-iterative process, not a linear process following the collection of data. (Hettiarachchi, 2013 citing Lichtman) ^[18]. Therefore, once the interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the interviews and noted down the codes. Swell citing Glasser and Laudel states that, "the function of codes, pertaining to a qualitative study, is to indicate what is talked about in a segment of text codes, thus support the retrieval of text segments which in turn can be used to group them, according to thematic aspects of the data they contain." Once the initial coding was done the researcher started organizing those codes into related categories. Some codes were identified as major topics at this stage while several others were organized under a few major topics (Hettiarachi 2013 citing Litchman) ^[18]. The process was repeated several times to note if there were any redundancies on the list and to ensure that significant themes related to the study were not ignored since, "at the heart of qualitative data analysis is the task of discovering themes."

The theme identification is one of the most fundamental task in qualitative research Swell. This process yielded five major themes as related to students' attitudes to bilingual education: peer pressure, learner autonomy, social relations, social recognition and language proficiency. In addition, the interview participants were given pseudonyms in the results and discussion section. Furthermore, the researcher also used an observation protocol in classroom observations and field notes were used to describe the key events during the observation sessions. In addition, narrative summaries allowed the researcher to make written accounts of main things that occurred during the observation sessions in order to capture much information as possible (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46]. Then, the findings of the observations were used to support the interview data in order to enhance the reliability of the study.

3. Findings and Discussions

This study revealed diverse range of attitudes of students to bilingual education in Sri Lanka. To begin with, the study exposed 5 major themes related to bilingual education: peer pressure, learner autonomy, social relations, social recognition and language proficiency.

3.1. Findings

3.1.1. Peer pressure

Peer pressure is the influence exerted by a peer group or an individual encouraging other individuals to change their attitudes, values or behaviors in order to conform to group norms (Maina citing Treynor). Peer pressure is not always a bad thing because peer groups can also have a very positive influence on individual's behavior. According to Maina, possibly, peer pressure can also be a source of learning opportunity and a source of encouragement.

Accordingly, one of the major themes that was exposed in the study was peer pressure. Majority of the participants from monolingual stream (Sinhala) shared their experiences of peer pressure exerted by the students in the bilingual education program in a negative light. According to research findings it was revealed that, exclusion of monolingual stream students during group work by bilingual stream students in junior secondary classes prevents them from exhibiting their potentials which often brings a negative effect on their academic progression. Following is an interview account by Kamal, a grade 10 student from a reputed boy's school in Western province, who got the entry to the school from the scholarship examination from Anuradhapura district,

"When I was in grade 6, my friends in English medium stream bullied us for not speaking in English. When we were given group activities, even though the teacher mingled us with the friends in the bilingual stream, they always excluded us from the group..."

"The friends in the English medium stream considered that they are superior due to the fact that they know English... We were never given opportunities to show our potentials especially during the English period."

This fact was also obvious in the observations the researcher conducted in grade 6 and 7 classes in each school. Though, the students in the bilingual and monolingual streams were mingled in the same class, there existed clear divisions among the two sets of students. The students in the bilingual stream sat on one side while the students in the monolingual stream sat on the other side. When they were assigned group activities, the students in the bilingual stream often disliked to join with their peers in the monolingual stream.

In addition, Nimal, a grade 9 student, from the same boy's school, who also got the entry to the school from the scholarship examination, shared one of his experiences about how he felt being a student in the monolingual stream (Sinhala medium),

"Though I had a desire to select English medium, I did not select it, because I am a child from a low income family. So I did not want to trouble my parents asking for money to afford private tuition classes. Though I did not select bilingual stream, I am competent in English and I usually score high marks for the term tests in school."

"... When I was in grade 7, given that I am a student in the Sinhala medium, I was not given the opportunity to take part in English day competitions though I equally scored as the English medium student in the selection test. I still remember how he mocked at me after been selected for English day competitions. I was really sad and disappointed on that day."

This implies that students in the bilingual stream are given privilege and recognition over students in the monolingual stream despite the equal performance in language. Accordingly, though bilingual education is considered to promote inclusivity in the education system, yet there exists a form of exclusionism in the prevailing system.

The research findings revealed that, the pressure exerted by the peers perhaps takes the students into a second thought of

shifting the medium of instruction into English. In addition, the research study also found that, bilingual education has created divisions among students even though monolingual and bilingual students are mingled in the same classrooms. The participants also revealed an element of social class that accounts for the divisions among the students given the perceived elitist nature of English language in the country. Following are two interview accounts by Nelum and Kaveesha, a grade 10 student and a 9 student from a reputed girl's school in Western province who are in the monolingual stream,

"We are strictly restricted by the other girls who are in the English medium stream. We are given less recognition even by the teachers in the English medium stream. We almost feel marginalized in the classrooms in many occasions... I think there are also issues related to social class because most of the girls in the English medium stream are from upper middle classes."

"We are often being treated differently by our peers in the bilingual stream which frequently gives us a feeling of regret to the extent that, "it would be better if we chose to learn in the English medium."

The observations conducted in the girl's school also supported the above mentioned points in several occasions. In one of the grade six classes, during the English period, the teacher raised a question to a student in the monolingual stream. But, she could not answer it. As a consequence, most of the students in the bilingual stream began to raise their hands and say "miss, why don't you ask it from us, not like them we can answer." A same kind of instance took place in the boy's school where a bunch of students in the bilingual stream, pointing to two students in the monolingual stream claimed, "miss you don't teach them, they don't understand English and they don't speak English". The two students felt embarrassed and one hid his head keeping on the desk. Hence, concerning all the findings, it was revealed in the study that learners in the monolingual stream (Sinhala) are being pressurized by their peers in the bilingual stream in many occasions (English and Sinhala) and it affects the academic progression and learning opportunities and establishment of their identity. In addition, there is also an element of social class among students, which further boosts this polarization.

3.1.2. Social relations

Maintaining social relationships is central to the education system. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a key aim of inclusive education is to 'eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability.' (Wijesekara, 2018 citing UNESCO, 2009) [46]. The participants of the interview stated how the existing education system and the school environment influence in maintaining social relationships. Ganeshan and Vishwa, two Tamil medium students of grade 10 from the same boy's school revealed the kind of interaction, they have between bilingual (English and Sinhala/ English and Tamil) and monolingual (Sinhala medium) students. Following is an interview account by Ganeshan.

"When we were in grade 6 and 7, our class was next to an English medium class and a Sinhala medium class. They never had any sort of interactions with us. We always existed as a separate bunch of students. I think it was due to ethnic issues...even now it is the same..."

Accordingly, this indicates the ethnic polarization that exists in the education system which acts as an obstacle in maintaining social relationships in the context of school. Ramanathan, a Tamil medium student and Gauri, a Tamil girl studying in the Sinhala medium stream also supported the above claim. Following is an excerpt from Ramanathan's interview.

"We hardly have interactions with our peers in the English/ Sinhala bilingual stream and Sinhala medium classes... but, we have close interactions with our peers in the Tamil and English bilingual stream. They are very good and cooperative. They help us in academics, especially in learning English language..."
[Ramanathan]

The above claim can be justified with the observations the researcher conducted. The students in the Tamil/English bilingual stream and Tamil monolingual stream seemed to be cooperative unlike the students in the English/Sinhala bilingual programme and Sinhala monolingual programmes. They willingly grouped with the students in the monolingual (Tamil) stream irrespective of the medium of instruction.

"Though we are studying in Sinhala medium, we have a lesser interaction with Sinhala friends" [Gauri]

Accordingly, the above interview accounts manifest that the existing education system is implicitly perpetuating ethnic exclusionism, responsible for misunderstanding and alienation among the Sinhala speaking and Tamil speaking communities. (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46].

In addition, Sudheera, a grade 9 student, and Malaka, a grade 10 student, in the bilingual stream (English and Sinhala) from the boy's school came up with similar statements about the social interactions that exist in their school setting. Following is a quote by Sudheera.

"When we were in grade 6 and 7 we hardly had interactions with the peers in the Sinhala medium classes ...we never had any interactions either with the students in the English and Tamil bilingual stream or Tamil medium classes... But, we gradually overcame these grudges when we go into grade 8 and 9...But still we have no connection with Tamil students."

Malaka in his interview came up with a similar and a more interesting statement,

"Though bilingual and monolingual students are mingled in the same class, it is something usual for bilingual students to have lesser interaction with the students in the monolingual stream in grade 6 and 7 classes..."

"I think that is because of the influence of parents and their attitudes on students, because most of the students in the bilingual stream have higher social status in the society. Therefore, the students in the bilingual stream

often avoid relationships and interactions with the students in the Sinhala medium classes. However, as we grow up we become mature enough to see what is good and what is not. So, gradually we overcome such issues and build up good relationships with them."

According to the research study majority of the participants from bilingual (Sinhala and English) and monolingual (Sinhala) streams in the boy's school claimed, though they had divisions and lesser interaction between the bilingual and monolingual streams, they tend to overcome this polarization as they mature. In addition it was also revealed that the parents' attitudes of the students in the bilingual education (English and Sinhala) affect the behavior of students in junior secondary classes.

Though the boys overcome the polarization between bilingual and monolingual streams as they mature, according to the findings of the study the girls remain to be unchanged in their attitudes and thoughts irrespective of their maturity. The following is an interview account by Samadhi, a grade 10 student in the bilingual stream from the girl's school,

"Actually, we don't want to maintain close relationships with peers in the monolingual stream...because there is no need, that's it."

The mixed school in the North Western Province has a separate class for bilingual students and the rest 5 parallel classes are in the monolingual stream. Aruni, a grade 10 student in the monolingual stream (Sinhala) said that,

"English medium class exist as a separate one. But, the boys in the English medium classes are better than girls...boys maintain relationships up to a certain extent with the peers in Sinhala medium classes, but girls are not. Most of the girls in the English medium classes are proud."

Sanka, a grade 10 student in the bilingual stream presented an interesting statement,

"We don't have a difference whether the friends are from English medium or Sinhala medium. We have friends even in Sinhala medium classes...But, girls in English medium classes are not like that...they even put the blame upon boys in our class for speaking with the girls in Sinhala medium classes, he said, laughing, "ape panthiye gahanu lamai kohomath adi dekek withara udin tamai inne."

Thus, the findings of the study revealed that the boys and girls differ in the way they perceive relationships with peers. While boys overcome divisions, the girls tend to remain unchanged even when they go into higher classes. They seem to be strictly concerned in maintaining interactions and relationships with peers in the school since they perceive bilingual education as a prestige. Language appears to be a social marker for the girls in the bilingual education program. As Gunasekara (2005) states, in the case of social disparity, the real gulf in Sri Lankan society is not based on religion, ethnicity, money or caste, it is based on language, the gap between those who know English and those who do not know English.

3.1.3. Learner autonomy

The term 'autonomy' which is derived originally from the fields of politics and moral philosophy, is a slippery term, because it is widely confused with self-instruction and independent learning. It is also a multi-faceted concept whose meaning has been discussed from many perspectives by theoreticians (Najeeb, 2012 citing Benson)^[12]. Holec defined learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". He also noted that this ability is not inborn but must be acquired, either by natural means or by formal learning, and pointed out that "to take charge of one's learning is to have the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning." Thus, Benson (citing Dam *et al*) states that "learner autonomy as 'a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person.'"

Accordingly, this research study revealed learner autonomy as a key feature related to bilingual education where learners read a lot to find more on the subject matters and discuss with the friends to share their knowledge. Following is an interview account by, Sudheera and Malaka in the bilingual stream (English and Sinhala).

Sudheera in his interview said,

"Most of the time we can't depend only on the teachers and the private tuition classes...though the teachers have subject knowledge, majority of them are not proficient in language use.

Sometimes they use Sinhala to explain difficult points..."

"We read lot of extra books related to academics."

Malaka, also supported Sudheera's claim,

"Most of the students read lot of books to be thorough with subject matters. We can't totally depend on teachers because they touch only the surface level of the lesson."

"Even in inter school quizzes majority of the members in the team represent the students from the bilingual stream."

Kalani, a grade 10 student from the girl's school also supported the above claims,

"We had to read a lot since learning subject matters in English is really a challenge. Because there are lot of technical terms to study."

The observations also support the above claims. Especially in the girl's school they kept extra books related to their subjects on the tables and when the teacher leaves the class at the end of the period, they take the books and read. In the boy's school, the students in the bilingual streams (English/ Sinhala and English/Tamil) had books related to experiments and technology. They shared what they read with their teachers and sometimes they asked questions from teachers on what they read. In one of the grade 6 classes in the boy's school, one boy asked a question from the teacher on what he read. But, the teacher could not answer. Then he explained the answer to the teacher and then the teacher appreciated him. This implies that most of the students in the bilingual stream are self-directed.

Accordingly, research findings revealed, that majority of the

students in the bilingual education program do not completely rely and depend on teachers. They seek knowledge, depending highly on reading. Hence, students in the bilingual stream are self-oriented, which can be viewed as an advantage in bilingual education.

3.1.4. Social recognition

Each individual prefers to gain recognition by the society and to establish self-esteem. This study revealed that, the students in the bilingual stream are more likely to gain recognition, in the society and in the job market and even at the school. Thus, this was accepted by students in both monolingual and bilingual streams. Majority of the participants said that students in the bilingual stream are highly recognized by the society. Following is an interview account by Meena, a grade 10 Tamil student in the monolingual stream (Sinhala) in the girl's school.

"The students in the bilingual stream are considered significant and they are given a high recognition by the society...even in the job market, they will be recognized more than the monolingual students."

Aruni, Nelum and Kaveesha, three, grade 10 monolingual stream students (Sinhala) claimed quiet similar views. Their perception was that irrespective of the medium of instruction one offers at school, anyone is socially recognized if they are competent in English language. Following is an interview account by Nelum, which supports the above claim.

"It is true that the students in the English medium stream are more likely to have social recognition by the society, but I also think despite English medium and Sinhala medium, if someone is fluent in English, they gain the recognition in the society and even in the job market."

In addition, Ramanathan, and Meena, in the interview stated that, the term "English" has been gained a higher status in Sri Lanka and if someone knows English, "they are given a high recognition by the society" and they have a wide scope in the job market both locally and globally.

According to research findings, all the students in the bilingual program and a few students in the monolingual stream compromised that students in the bilingual education program have a significant recognition over monolingual students from school level up to the international job market while a few female participants claimed that, despite the medium of instruction, anyone can gain recognition if they are competent in English language.

This finding can be supported by Fernando (1997)^[15] who states that, English has always been associated with social prestige in Sri Lankan society, ever since it was brought to the country by the British. As a result, its speakers have always received higher social recognition and advantages in the country, especially when it comes to employment. As she further says, English still has a grudgingly recognized but decided social, cultural and economic value in Sri Lanka (Hettiarachchi, 2013)^[18]. As implied by the research findings, English Language continues to spread wider social inequalities and create stigma in masses of the public while creating opportunities for the elites. (Wijesekara, 2018)^[46].

3.1.5. Language proficiency

In general sense language proficiency is one's ability to

perform in a language. The proficiency of the language varies depending on individuals. The study revealed, though students in the bilingual stream are proficient in English, their performance in Sinhala is poor since they have a limited exposure to Sinhala as majority of the bilingual stream students use English as their home language.

Majority of the participants in the bilingual stream (English and Sinhala) said that Sinhala is difficult for them and they do not like to learn Sinhala. Following are two interview accounts by Malika and Samadhi who supported this claim,

"I score more for English than Sinhala. It even irritates me to write Sinhala letters, they are very difficult."

"Sinhala is the most difficult subject for me. Even at home I use English."

Accordingly, these claims support the statement by Baker who says that, "where English has rapidly spread, the danger is that it does not encourage bilingualism but rather a shift towards English... especially in schools", given the invasiveness of English language." (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46]. Though, bilingual education is thought to develop one's first language (Sinhala/Tamil) and the dominant language in the society (English) simultaneously, the findings of the research revealed that bilingual education is more likely to make a shift towards the dominant language; English.

In addition Senaka and Aruni, a female and a male student from grade 10, said that they are fluent in Sinhala language than English language and usually score high marks for Sinhala. Following are their interview accounts.

"I am not fluent in English, but I am competent in Sinhala. I score better marks for Sinhala. So I am satisfied with it."

"Sinhala is an easy subject. I am very good in Sinhala, especially in writing. But, English is very difficult for me."

3.2. Discussion

The main aim of the introduction of bilingual education programme in government schools was to offer equal access to linguistic capital, thus improving equity (National Commission of education). Though this was the policy, according to research findings, it was revealed that rather than equal access to linguistic capital, in practice bilingual education has perpetuated unequal access to linguistic capital creating language hierarchies given the perceived elitist nature of English language in the country. Generally, the negative qualities such as prejudices, biases and discriminations are attributed to adults. But, this study proves that they are equally rooted even in students, reflecting symbolic violence over the group with less proficiency in English. Accordingly, though explicitly invisible bilingual education implicitly has nurtured negative attitudes and behaviors in students.

As is evident in Kaveesha's interview account, those who have linguistic capital i.e. English, also have economic capital and higher status in the social space- "I think there are also issues related to social class because most of the girls in the English medium stream are from upper middle classes". This shows how "knowing English" also relates to social class; there is a connection between elitism and English language proficiency and social class. (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46].

Accordingly, the study revealed the hegemony of English to create divisions even among the same ethnicity manifesting the relationship between language and capital and the capacity of English capital to reproduce and perpetuate disparities in social class where symbolic violence is central. (Wijesekara, 2018 citing Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) ^[46]. Thus, contrary to bilingual education policy, bilingual education itself has formed two poles; those who have the legitimated linguistic capital and those who lack the legitimated linguistic capital (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46]. If the students are from a higher social class, they may be much less affected by the condescension, prejudice, or discrimination. They may in fact feel superior to those others because of their social status (Vandrick, 1995) ^[43].

In addition, the research findings also proved that, teachers, who are considered to be a significant part in the school authorities are implicitly nurturing this division among students, as evident in Nelum's statement- "we are given a less recognition even by the teachers in the English medium stream". Accordingly, though, educational institutions are partially responsible for promoting social cohesion and perpetuating peace and non-violence, (Ministry of education, 2008) the responsible authorities in the very same education system fosters prejudices and stereotypes among students. Therefore, this implies that the teachers in the bilingual stream also consider that they are accredited more power and recognition through English.

In addition, the students in the monolingual education program are implicitly disempowered and are deprived of their rights to be heard and talked by their peers in the bilingual stream, as evident in the interview account by Kamal, "even though the teacher mingled us with the friends in the bilingual stream, they always excluded us from the group...we were never given opportunities to show our potentials, especially during the English period". Accordingly, the students who are not proficient in English seem to lose their legitimate right to talk and to be heard (Bourdieu, 1991) ^[7]. Hence, though the policies on bilingual education aimed to offer equal access to linguistic capital promoting equity among students, the students and the teachers in the bilingual education have manifested it in a different way and use it as weapon to oppress other students in the monolingual stream. Thus, this argument is substantiated by Bourdieu (1991) ^[7] who says that "those who have the language continue to use it as a weapon or as a means of symbolic domination over those who cannot speak it". (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46].

In addition, the study also accounted for the ethnic polarization that prevails in the education system. According to Chandra (2006) ^[8] in Sri Lanka, language is the main classificatory criterion between the two most contesting ethnic groups – the Sinhalese and the Tamils. This segregation has a historical root in a thirty-year long civil war that ended in 2009 (Wijesekara, 2018 citing Buckland 2005, Cohen 2007) ^[10, 46]. In one of the studies on bilingual education, it has been found that, bilingual education pedagogy has facilitated the breaking of barriers of separation between diverse ethnic groups and the formation of one inclusive community in the bilingual education programme. (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46]. But, in the present study such findings were not explored given the ethnically segregated classrooms in the school settings as is evident in one of the interview accounts- "when we were in grade 6 and 7, our class was next to an English medium class and a Sinhala medium class. They

never had any sort of interactions with us. We always existed as a separate bunch of students.” One of the interesting findings of the present study was that, the cooperation, interactions and strong relationships that exist between the students in the Tamil/English bilingual stream and Tamil monolingual stream that lacks between the students in English/Sinhala bilingual stream and Sinhala monolingual stream. Accordingly, this difference in the divisions between Tamil and Sinhala ethnicities are rather dilemmatic and this would be an interesting direction for future research.

The present study also implied the knowledge of English as a symbol of capital and an easy access to social recognition. As evident in the interview, students in the bilingual stream are preoccupied with the idea that “they have a plenty of opportunities in the job market with higher positions.” Accordingly, the research findings on the other hand manifest that rather than biliteracy and bilingualism, the students in the bilingual education programme and their parents are more concerned with the recognition and their position in the social space through the knowledge of English. Further, Wijesekara (2018) ^[46] provides evidence to substantiate this claim stating that, bilingual education is an investment strategy in English language education or the accumulation of English linguistic capital which offers many profits.

Another important finding of the present study was the tendency of bilingual stream students to deviate from their mother tongue given the pervasive nature of the English language as evident in Malika’s interview account- “I score more for English than Sinhala and it even irritates me to write Sinhala letters, they are very difficult.” Accordingly, this again contradicts with the bilingual education policy, which aimed at promoting bilingualism and biliteracy in students. Thus, the lack of proficiency in mother tongue can be viewed as a barrier and this in turn have a greater tendency to detach the students from their culture and values. This was also evident in the observations the researcher conducted in each school where the students in the English medium instruction program showed less respect to their teachers often interrupting the classroom by engaging in annoying activities. On the other hand the deviation of the cultural values may be the reason behind the students in the bilingual education program to ill-treat and oppress their peers in the monolingual stream. Accordingly, Canagarajah and de Souza provide evidence to substantiate the above claims stating that, the instrumental value of English has overridden the cultural values attached to vernacular languages. (Wijesekara, 2018) ^[46].

Another important finding that was exposed in the study was the autonomous nature of the learners in the bilingual education program. As mentioned above, the deviation of bilingual stream students from their mother tongue has attributed them with negative values. But, this also has another side which was uncovered by many, that is the shift towards English of the students in the bilingual stream has also attributed them with certain positive values such as confidence, autonomy, self-esteem, and independence through the exposure to the culture linked with English language. Accordingly, language is like a mirror reflecting a society’s customs, traditions and cultural elements.

Accordingly, taking all the findings and the discussions into consideration, it is evident that there exists certain drawbacks in policies and policy proposals on bilingual education which aimed to offer equal opportunities for students to gain equal access to linguistic capital by promoting bilingualism and

biliteracy in students. (National Commission of Education). Accordingly, the research findings of the present study lays emphasize on an immediate need to re-visit the policies on bilingual education.

4. Conclusion, Recommendations and Suggestions

This chapter contains the conclusions based on the research questions and a summary of the key findings of the study and recommendations and directions for future research.

4.1. Conclusion

To begin with, the study was guided by the following research question,

1. What are the general attitudes of the students in the bilingual education towards the students who follow other medium of instruction and the vice versa?

The following section provide conclusions for the above research question and ultimately an overall conclusion of the study.

Addressing the research question- (the general attitudes of the students in the bilingual education towards the students who follow other medium of instruction and the vice versa), the research study found that the students in the bilingual stream devalue their peers in the monolingual stream with the perception that they are superior to the students in the monolingual stream. In addition, the students in the bilingual stream are of the view that English language proficiency of the students in the monolingual stream are poor and therefore they lack access to the linguistic capital.

The students in the monolingual stream think that they are being delimited by their peers in the monolingual stream and they are given a less recognition in the school career. In addition, these students view their peers in the bilingual stream in a negative light as they are often being excluded by the peers in the bilingual stream (English and Sinhala). Furthermore, the students in the monolingual stream are occupied with the idea that majority of the students in the bilingual education are from upper middle classes which contribute in creating divisions between the students in the two medium of instruction; bilingual and monolingual. Thus, they consider the students in the bilingual stream are privileged over monolingual stream which often limit the opportunities for the students in the monolingual stream.

Overall, taking all the findings and discussions into consideration, the study revealed two facets of bilingual education; positive and negative. Concerning the positive side, the study revealed numerous instances of learner autonomy practiced by the students in the bilingual education program which they have been a part of, coupled with their exposure to the culture linked with the English language. Further, this can be viewed as an advantage in the bilingual education. Apart from this, the social recognition given to bilingual students over monolingual students can also be viewed as a positive point in bilingual education.

Taking an insight into the negative aspects of bilingual education, one of the key issues, the study revealed was the nurturing of adult attributes such as prejudices, biases and discriminations in students which on the other hand contribute in the perpetuation of social boundaries in school settings, disempowering their peers in the monolingual stream. In addition, the study also showed the nurturing of negative values in the students in bilingual programs such as disrespecting teachers and adults and degrading their peers who lack the access to linguistic capital, which is a

consequence of the deviation from their mother tongue. This in fact has implicitly distant them from the cultural values linked with their mother tongue.

Accordingly, though the policies on bilingual education aimed to offer every student with an equal access to linguistic capital, thus promoting equity and bilingualism in students, the findings of the present study revealed that there exists a considerable disparity between bilingual education policy and practice. Therefore, the research findings demand an immediate re-visit on bilingual education policies by the relevant government bodies linked to education system in the country.

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