

# IDENTIFICATION OF ATTITUDES AND PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION FOR G.C.E. A/L BIOLOGY STUDENTS IN COLOMBO DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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The proficiency and ability to work in English language is often considered as two of the keys to success in educational and professional pursuits in the era of post colonial independence. English language has been introduced recently in Year 2001 as one of the media of instruction for primary and secondary education in schools after few historical attempts of introductions and withdrawals. Meantime the society, especially stakeholders, such as students, teachers and parents, has diverse concerns and opinions regarding the use of English as medium of instruction (MOI). However, no studies have been conducted to date to identify these concerns and opinions in Sri Lanka according to our knowledge. Therefore the present study was conducted as a pilot project to identify the concerns and opinions of stakeholders in using English as MOI for Advanced Level Education in Colombo District, Sri Lanka, which is the central education hub in the country.

Three main target groups were considered for the data collection (*i.e.* students, teachers and parents). 80 students who did General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) in 2010, 62 teachers who had experience in teaching General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level: A/L) subjects in English and 60 parents having children in Advanced Level classes or planning to attend classes in the next year were selected. For each group three different questionnaires were administered to gather data. Students, teachers and parents were randomly selected from schools in Colombo district. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package SPSS 17.

A significant association ( $P < 0.001$ ) was detected among the students' preferred MOI for A/L and the reasons for preference. Out of English medium students, 87.3% preferred English medium to have better opportunities for further studies and to compete for jobs. The association between preferred MOI during primary education and secondary education was significant ( $P < 0.01$ ). A 76.3% of students preferred English as the MOI for primary and secondary education where as 17.4% of respondents shifted from English to mother tongue in their secondary education. A significant association was detected between religion and medium of instruction for A/L ( $P < 0.01$ ). When considering the 40% Christian students, all of them (100%) preferred English medium for A/L. Out of Buddhist students, 23.7 % preferred English as MOI and 20% preferred Sinhala medium for A/L. National school teachers (35.4%) stated that a considerable number of students have a good linguistic proficiency, provincial school teachers (40.3%) stated that very few students have the necessary competency level (64%) while teachers in private schools (20.9%) stated that majority were good while others said some have problems (61.5%).

Association between the preferred MOI for A/L and the race of the child's parent was significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). From the Sinhalese parents interviewed, majority (65.8%) preferred their child to do A/L s in Sinhala medium while others (34.1%) preferred English medium.

Out of Tamil parents 54.5% had selected English as the medium of instruction for A/Ls while 27.2% have selected Tamil and 18.18% have selected Sinhala. Out of Muslim parents 42.8% have selected English, 42.8% have selected Sinhala and 14.2% selected Tamil. The association between the religion of the parent and the medium of instruction for their child in A/L also showed significance ( $P < 0.05$ ). Most of the Buddhist parents (72.7%) preferred Sinhala as the medium for A/L while 27.2% selected English. Out of Christian parents majority (66.6%) selected English while 25% have selected Sinhala and 8.3% selected Tamil.

Fifty percent of the parents have selected English because it also aids in reaching the international job market. Out of them 41.6% have mentioned that they are scared about child's future if the child studies in English for A/Ls. In addition 19.4% have mentioned that there is a lack of affordable resources and 16.6% additionally mentioned the immoral behavioral/negative social and cultural development that was seen when studying in English.

The parents who favored English as MOI expect that their children will be better prepared for the higher education, high paid job opportunities and migration opportunities. A significant proportion of parents especially those who are working in government sector jobs preferred their children learning in mother tongue because of the very high competitive nature in A/L. They might send their children through English medium primary education but be very skeptical in sending the children through English medium A/Ls. Parents are also in the general opinion that most of the teachers are not so competent in teaching in English.

These results imply that if Sri Lanka wants to use English as MOI in A/L education and in other primary education systems, several improvements must be made before the full scale implementation in the country. In order to have efficient teaching/learning process, teachers must be trained in to teach in English with the internationally accepted latest teaching techniques. They should be aware that the balanced immersion technique of English with mother tongue can be initially used. Therefore Education Ministry should have plans to tap best graduates with very high language skills to be employed as teachers in the country. Until the long term plans are set, schools can work with universities, faculty and senior students, to strengthen the English medium instruction in the schools.

There must be a clear plan for the provisioning of extra resources documented in English medium education. The Ministry of Education has started this effort and recently private stakeholders like large scale telecommunication service providers are also stepping in to this process. These initiatives must be encouraged and proper accreditation systems must be setup to maintain the overall quality. Language labs, IT facilities, computer literacy of both students and teachers must be enhanced to achieve better results of using English as MOI. The results of the present study can be used to understand the current situation regarding English as MOI in Colombo district and this information is immensely important to design more large scale surveys to understand the situation in whole country.