

Should english be the medium of instruction in sri lankan universities



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Medium of instruction is a language used in teaching. It may or may not be the official language of the country or territory. Where the first language of students is different from the official language, it may be used as the medium of instruction for part or all of schooling and universities. Bilingual or multilingual education may involve the use of more than one language of instruction. UNESCO considers that " providing education in a child's mother tongue is indeed a critical issue" Native-language instruction is the practice of teaching schoolchildren in their native language instead of in the official language of their country of residence. An English medium education system is one that uses English as the primary medium of instruction — in particular where English is not the mother tongue of the students. Because a working knowledge of English is perceived as being valuable, many states throughout the world where English is not the predominant language encourage or mandate the use of English as the normal medium of instruction. Bilingual education involves teaching academic content in two languages, in a native and secondary language with varying amounts of each language used in accordance with the program model. There are two ways of Bilingual education. First one is Transitional Bilingual Education. This involves education in a child's native language, typically for no more than three years, to ensure that students do not fall behind in content areas like mathematics, science, and social studies while they are learning English. Research has shown that many of the skills learned in the native language can be transferred easily to the second language later. The goal is to help students transition to mainstream, English-only classrooms as quickly as possible, and the linguistic goal of such programs is English acquisition only.

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In a transitional bilingual program, the student's primary language is used as a vehicle to develop literacy skills and acquire academic knowledge. It is used to develop literacy and academic skills in the primary language. Second one is "Two-Way" or Dual Language Immersion Bilingual Education. These programs are designed to help native and non-native English speakers become bilingual and bi-literate. The two-way bilingual immersion program has 90% of the instructions in grade 1 in minority language which is less supported by the broader society and 10% in the majority language. This proportion gradually changes in the majority language until the curriculum is equally divided in both the language by 5th grade. The two-way bilingual immersion program is based on the principle of clear curriculum separation of the two languages of instruction. Teachers do not repeat or translate the subject matter in second language but strengthen concepts taught in one language across the two languages in a spiral curriculum in order to provide cognitive challenge. The languages of instructions are alternated by theme or content area. This type of immersion is required to develop the dual language proficiency, as social language can be mastered in couple of years, but a higher level of competency is required to read social studies texts or solve mathematics word problems, roughly around 5 to 7 years. This essay attempts to take into account of divergent views to deal with "Should English be the medium of instruction in Sri Lankan Universities". . The debate on English as a medium of instruction in tertiary level education was always carried out among the Sri Lankan society. Majority claims that "who can never speak English with the degree of adequacy or fluency is not survived in the job arena of the white collar's. " Almost the private sector investors' basic requirement is the employees should be able to communicate with the <https://assignbuster.com/should-english-be-the-medium-of-instruction-in-sri-lankan-universities/>

mediation language of the globe. When we consider about trading with other countries, tourism, IT Sector and the other areas of high salary paying employment opportunities govern by the people with the command in English. Or at least they know how to deal with the language and the opportunity they involved with. And jobs in the private sector which require functioning knowledge of English have enabled migration across the globe. However, one can point out the flaw in the system which restricts the benefits of the migration to 8-10% English speaking elite and middle class of the total population in Sri Lanka. Some view English as an elitist urban cultural value, derived from the west, which is imposed on the nation. This argument sees English as a language left behind by the whites and claims that cultural and linguistic authenticity is tied to thinking, speaking and writing only in vernacular languages. The argument also suggests that if the academia shifts to English it might sound the death knell for native languages as there will be fewer and fewer literary works in native languages. The general obsession with English and with the notion of "sophistication" attached to the language has been a major cause of increasing divisions and psychological distress among the youth. University drop out rates can potentially increase among the students with weaker English skills. The above arguments tend to draw their inspiration from the fact that countries like Japan have done remarkably well in spite of a resolute emphasis on retaining their native languages even among children of the internet age. However, most works of science and human studies have, unfortunately, not been documented in Sri Lankan national languages to place complete reliance on the local medium even if we were to agree with the above arguments to do away with English. Developing our languages to

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impart higher education is important but depriving people of the access to the knowledge systems in English is not correct. It is important to invest in education in our country to create resources to impart the language skills required to fully utilize the educational opportunities offered in English. To take a pragmatic view, introduction of English at an early stage in children's education is necessary without being overbearing on the native languages. Perhaps we should look to the European Union in this regard, to develop multilingual skills without compromising on the native character of individual nation. Some Sri lankans are firmly convinced that the only way to learn English properly is to learn everything else through English. This is contrary to logic and evidenced both in Sri lanka and around the world. Children in every country today learn English, but they learn it as a foreign language, and learn it well, in all countries where English is not the native tongue. Consider countries like Korea, Japan, Germany, Sweden, Russia, Brazil and China. They have economies that are better than most. Their schools teach English, but employ their own mother tongues as the medium of instruction. Korea's population is equal to Sri Lanka. The Scandinavian countries are comparable, less in population size, to Sri Lanka Their languages remain vibrant, they create new knowledge and literature in their own languages and produce Nobel prize winners and world-beating companies. Of course, they also learn English, the de facto world language. Except in colonized Sri Lanka, nowhere do people believe that unless they abandon their mother tongue and embrace English as the sole language of instruction, their future is doomed.