

Making the ‘Silenced’ Voices ‘Heard’ in an English Medium Multilingual Teacher Education Context through Translanguaging

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This qualitative case study investigates how English-medium multilingual student teachers in a Sri Lankan National College of Education utilize translanguaging practices and how such practices impact their personal and professional identity transformation. The study focuses on Tamil-speaking student teachers who initially struggled to communicate in a Sinhala-dominant context and how translanguaging enables them to reposition themselves from linguistically marginalized individuals to empowered, inclusive future teachers. Five second-year student teachers representing diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds participated in the study. Data collection was done using semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and classroom observations. Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were employed to examine the participants’ experiences. The analysis revealed that translanguaging enabled these students to navigate complex power dynamics between dominant and non-dominant language speakers, facilitating communication, and identity transformation. Simultaneously, the minority students demonstrated strong motivation to acquire Sinhala and English languages investing significant effort to overcome initial marginalization. The CDA revealed the impact of linguistic hierarchies, particularly the dominance of the Sinhala language which initially positioned Tamil-speaking students as “outsiders.” Three participants described themselves as “silent” or “mute” at the beginning of the course, expressing a desire to return home due to their inability to communicate effectively. However, Content Analysis showed a gradual shift in language ideologies, as these students managed to use their full linguistic repertoires: Tamil, Sinhala, and English, based on the communicative demands of the context. Further, the findings highlighted that translanguaging creates new understandings and new spaces for these student teachers to move between languages, and it makes those “silenced” voices “heard” in the teacher education context. It was interesting to observe the tolerance, acceptance, and linguistic complementarity they displayed towards each other’s language and culture at the end of the course. The study also suggests that changes are required in current teacher education programmes to raise awareness of modern pedagogy and practice.

Keywords: Translanguaging, Teacher education, Multilingual speakers, Dominant language, Identity and power dynamics