

# Determinants of Successful Bilingual Secondary Education Implementation in Rural Sri Lanka: Evidence from Anuradhapura District

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## ABSTRACT

The expansion of English-medium and bilingual education (BE) in postcolonial contexts has intensified debates regarding institutional capacity, equity, and implementation effectiveness, particularly in rural settings. Drawing on institutional theory, this study investigates the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive determinants of the successful implementation of bilingual secondary education in the Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka. A quantitative survey design was employed to collect data from 200 teachers and school principals across five educational divisions. Using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, the study tested nine hypotheses encompassing internal (school climate, leadership, curriculum, teacher-related factors, and access to resources) and external (student-related factors, parental involvement, sociocultural interests, and language policy) determinants. The findings indicate that both institutional-level and contextual variables significantly predict the successful implementation of bilingual education. Teacher-related factors and access to resources emerged as the strongest internal predictors, while parental involvement and sociocultural attitudes demonstrated substantial external influence. The results underscore the interdependence between school-level leadership structures and broader policy and community environments in shaping the sustainability of bilingual programs. By operationalizing institutional theory within a rural South Asian educational context, this study extends existing bilingual education research beyond Western immersion and CLIL models. The findings offer empirically grounded policy implications for equitable expansion of English-medium education in resource-constrained, multilingual societies.

**Keywords:** bilingual education, English-medium instruction, institutional theory, rural education, Sri Lanka, educational policy

## INTRODUCTION

The global expansion of bilingual education and English-medium instruction (EMI) has reshaped language policy landscapes in multilingual societies. Governments increasingly promote EMI as a strategy to enhance educational quality, socioeconomic mobility, and global integration (Dearden, 2015; Macaro, 2018). Extensive research demonstrates cognitive and academic benefits associated with bilingualism, including enhanced executive control and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 2017; Cummins, 2000). However, scholars have cautioned that successful implementation depends on institutional conditions rather than policy adoption alone (May 2014; Tollefson, 2013).

While bilingual education literature has largely centred on North American immersion programs and European CLIL frameworks (García, 2009; García & Lin, 2017), comparatively fewer empirical investigations address rural postcolonial contexts. In such settings, EMI initiatives intersect with historical inequalities, uneven resource distribution, and sociocultural ambivalence toward English (Shohamy, 2006). Consequently, implementation outcomes vary significantly across regions within the same country.

Sri Lanka reintroduced English-medium secondary education in 2001 to enhance national English proficiency and foster interethnic integration. Despite widespread societal demand for English education (NEC, 2024), rural districts continue to experience challenges related to teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and community

perceptions. Existing Sri Lankan studies have primarily focused on descriptive policy analysis or student language outcomes (Ganeshalingam, 2020; Pradeepa & Antony, 2021), leaving a gap in district-level, theory-driven analysis of implementation determinants.

Drawing on institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008), this study conceptualizes successful bilingual education implementation as shaped by regulatory structures (policy frameworks and resource allocation), normative influences (professional expectations and parental engagement), and cultural-cognitive dimensions (societal beliefs about English and bilingualism). The study examines nine hypothesized relationships across internal school-level factors and external contextual variables using survey data from 200 educators in Anuradhapura District.

By situating bilingual education within institutional theory and providing empirical evidence from a rural South Asian context, this study contributes to broader debates on language policy implementation, institutional capacity, and educational equity in multilingual societies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Bilingual Education and English-Medium Instruction in Global Perspective

The rapid expansion of bilingual education and English-medium instruction (EMI) has become a defining feature of contemporary educational reform in multilingual societies. Across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, governments increasingly promote EMI as a mechanism to enhance global competitiveness, expand participation in higher education, and improve socioeconomic mobility (Dearden, 2015; Macaro, 2018). The policy diffusion of EMI reflects broader processes of globalization, where English functions as a lingua franca in academic, technological, and economic domains (Phillipson, 2009).

Research on bilingual education has consistently demonstrated cognitive, academic, and sociocultural benefits associated with additive bilingualism. Studies indicate that bilingual learners often exhibit enhanced executive control, cognitive flexibility, and metalinguistic awareness compared to monolingual peers (Bialystok, 2017; Cummins, 2000). Additive bilingual models, in which second-language acquisition strengthens rather than replaces the first language, have been associated with improved long-term academic achievement (Genesee, 2018; García, 2009). Furthermore, bilingual education has been linked to intercultural competence and identity negotiation in multilingual contexts (May, 2014).

However, despite these documented benefits, scholars caution that the success of bilingual education is highly context dependent. Implementation outcomes vary significantly across sociopolitical environments, institutional capacities, and resource distributions (Tollefson, 2013). Much of the dominant literature draws on North American immersion programs and European Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) models (García & Lin, 2017), in which relatively stable institutional infrastructures support bilingual initiatives. In contrast, postcolonial settings frequently confront structural inequalities, teacher shortages, and competing ideological narratives surrounding language and national identity (Shohamy, 2006).

These disparities underscore the importance of moving beyond pedagogical theory to examine institutional and contextual determinants of bilingual education implementation.

### Institutional Theory as an Analytical Framework

Institutional theory provides a robust conceptual lens for examining how organizational outcomes are shaped by broader structural forces. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organizations operate within institutionalized environments that confer legitimacy through adherence to formal rules and socially constructed norms. Scott (2008) further refines this perspective by identifying three interrelated pillars of institutions: regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive.

The regulatory pillar encompasses formal policies, governance structures, funding mechanisms, and accountability systems. In bilingual education contexts, this includes language-in-education policies, curriculum mandates, teacher qualification requirements, and resource allocation frameworks (Spolsky, 2004; Tollefson,

2013). The effectiveness of EMI reforms is often contingent upon the coherence and consistency of these regulatory mechanisms.

The normative pillar refers to professional standards, social expectations, and collective values that guide behaviour. In schools, this includes leadership commitment, teacher professional culture, and parental engagement (Baker, 2011). Normative pressures shape the extent to which bilingual education is perceived as desirable, legitimate, and professionally endorsed.

The cultural-cognitive pillar encompasses shared beliefs, taken-for-granted assumptions, and identity frameworks. In multilingual societies, attitudes toward English may reflect aspirations for upward mobility or, conversely, anxieties about linguistic displacement (May, 2014; Shohamy, 2006). These belief systems influence stakeholder motivation, student participation, and community support.

Applying institutional theory to bilingual education enables analysis of how regulatory structures, normative expectations, and cultural-cognitive beliefs collectively influence program sustainability. Rather than viewing implementation as a purely pedagogical process, this perspective situates bilingual education within broader sociopolitical and organizational systems.

## **Internal Institutional Determinants of Bilingual Education**

### **School Leadership and Organizational Climate**

School leadership has consistently been identified as a critical determinant of educational reform's success. Effective leaders shape institutional vision, allocate resources strategically, and cultivate professional learning cultures (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In bilingual education contexts, leadership commitment influences teacher morale, policy interpretation, and program coherence (Baker, 2011).

Research indicates that a positive school climate, characterized by trust, collaboration, and instructional support, facilitates the adoption of innovation and the sustainability of reform (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). In EMI settings, leadership plays a central role in mediating regulatory mandates and translating policy into practice. Where principals lack bilingual competence or strategic planning capacity, implementation may become fragmented.

From an institutional perspective, leadership operates at the intersection of regulatory and normative pillars, mediating formal policy expectations and professional norms within the school.

### **Teacher Capacity and Professional Development**

Teacher preparedness is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of bilingual education success (Macaro, 2018). Effective EMI instruction requires dual competence: subject-matter expertise and proficiency in pedagogical language. Inadequate teacher preparation often leads to simplified content delivery, reduced interaction, and reliance on rote methods (Dearden, 2015).

Cummins (2000) emphasizes that teacher beliefs about language learning significantly influence instructional quality. Teachers who adopt additive bilingual orientations are more likely to scaffold learning effectively and integrate translanguaging practices (García & Lin, 2017). Conversely, negative perceptions of EMI may reduce instructional commitment.

Professional development programs that integrate language pedagogy with content instruction have been shown to enhance teacher efficacy (Genesee, 2018). Institutional support for ongoing training, therefore, represents a crucial normative mechanism that reinforces the legitimacy of bilingual education.

### **Curriculum Design and Resource Allocation**

Curriculum coherence and material availability significantly shape EMI effectiveness. CLIL research demonstrates that successful bilingual programs integrate content objectives with explicit language scaffolding

(Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). In resource-constrained contexts, insufficient instructional materials often limit teacher flexibility and reduce student engagement.

Access to laboratories, digital resources, and language-support materials influences both instructional quality and student participation (UNESCO, 2020). Institutional theory suggests that resource allocation reflects regulatory commitment; inadequate funding signals symbolic adoption rather than substantive implementation.

## **External Contextual Determinants**

### **Student Characteristics and Motivation**

Student linguistic background, prior exposure to English, and socioeconomic status significantly influence outcomes in bilingual education (Genesee, 2018). Learners with limited foundational proficiency may experience cognitive overload in EMI classrooms (Sweller, 2011). Attendance patterns and self-efficacy further mediate engagement levels.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning English are shaped by broader sociocultural narratives about economic mobility and educational prestige (Dörnyei, 2009). In rural contexts, disparities in exposure and home-language environments may widen achievement gaps.

### **Parental Involvement**

Parental engagement has been linked to improved academic achievement and program sustainability (Epstein, 2011). In bilingual settings, parental attitudes toward English influence enrollment decisions, homework support, and reinforcement of language use outside school. When parents perceive EMI as a pathway to upward mobility, normative support strengthens the program's legitimacy.

However, socioeconomic constraints may limit active participation, particularly in rural areas. Institutional theory conceptualizes parental involvement as a normative force that reinforces or undermines school-level initiatives.

### **Sociocultural Attitudes and Language Policy**

Language ideologies play a central role in shaping educational reform. English may be perceived simultaneously as a tool for empowerment and a threat to linguistic heritage (Phillipson, 2009). Shohamy (2006) argues that language policies often reflect hidden political agendas, reproducing inequalities while appearing neutral.

In postcolonial contexts, EMI reforms may reproduce urban–rural disparities if regulatory support is uneven (Tollefson, 2013). The legitimacy of bilingual education depends not only on policy mandates but also on alignment with community identity frameworks.

### **Research Gap and Conceptual Integration**

While global research has examined bilingual education outcomes and policy diffusion extensively, three gaps remain evident.

First, much empirical evidence derives from Western immersion and CLIL contexts, with limited district-level analysis in rural South Asian settings. Second, prior Sri Lankan studies have primarily focused on descriptive policy narratives or student performance indicators, with insufficient integration of institutional theory. Third, few studies systematically examine the interaction between internal school-level determinants and external sociocultural forces within a unified analytical framework.

By operationalizing institutional theory's regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars, this study examines how internal institutional factors (leadership, teacher capacity, curriculum, school climate, and

resources) interact with external contextual variables (student characteristics, parental involvement, sociocultural attitudes, and policy frameworks) to shape successful bilingual secondary education implementation in a rural district.

This integrative approach contributes to broader debates on the implementation of language policy, institutional legitimacy, and educational equity in multilingual, resource-constrained systems.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the institutional and contextual determinants of the successful implementation of bilingual secondary education in a rural Sri Lankan setting. Grounded in institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008), the study tested nine hypothesised relationships between internal and external factors and the successful implementation of bilingual secondary education. A survey-based approach was selected to enable systematic measurement of multiple constructs across a defined geographical region and to permit statistical testing of theoretically derived relationships. The study was conducted in Anuradhapura District, a predominantly rural region characterised by disparities in educational infrastructure and teacher availability compared to urban centres. The target population consisted of teachers and school principals directly involved in bilingual secondary education (Grades 6–13). A stratified random sampling strategy was adopted to ensure proportional representation across five educational divisions—Anuradhapura, Kebithigollewa, Thambuttegama, Kekirawa, and Galenbindunuwewa—as well as across school categories (national and provincial) and professional roles (teachers and principals). A total of 200 respondents participated in the study. The adequacy of this sample size was confirmed using established statistical criteria. Following recommendations by Hair et al. (2019), a minimum of 15–20 observations per predictor variable is required for multiple regression analysis; with nine predictors included in the model, the minimum recommended sample size was 135–180 cases. Additionally, power analysis guidelines (Cohen, 1992) indicate that, to detect medium effect sizes at  $\alpha = .05$  with adequate statistical power (.80), a sample size of at least 114 respondents would be sufficient. The achieved sample, therefore, exceeded methodological requirements and ensured adequate statistical robustness.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire developed based on established bilingual education and institutional theory literature (Baker, 2011; García, 2009; May, 2014). The instrument comprised three sections: demographic information, independent variables measuring internal and external determinants, and a dependent variable measuring successful implementation of bilingual secondary education. The independent variables included positive school climate, school leadership, curriculum characteristics, teacher-related factors (perception, availability, and training), access to resources, student-related factors (motivation, attendance, and self-esteem), parental involvement, sociocultural interests, and perceived language policy support. The dependent variable consisted of five items assessing program effectiveness and sustainability. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Content validity was established through expert review by senior academics specializing in bilingual education and educational leadership, and minor modifications were incorporated to enhance contextual clarity. A pilot test was conducted with 25 bilingual education teachers outside the main study area to refine wording and assess reliability; all constructs exceeded the acceptable Cronbach's alpha threshold of .70.

Construct validity was further assessed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Component Analysis and Varimax rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy exceeded .80, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Items with factor loadings below .50 or with substantial cross-loadings were removed to ensure construct clarity. The resulting factor structure aligned with the theoretical dimensions derived from institutional theory. Internal consistency reliability was subsequently examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with all constructs exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating satisfactory reliability. Given the self-reported nature of survey data, potential common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test; the first factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance, suggesting that common method variance did not pose a significant threat. Procedural remedies were also implemented, including anonymity assurances and separation of independent and dependent variable sections within the

instrument.

Data were analysed using SPSS (Version XX). Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics, assessment of missing data, and evaluation of normality using skewness and kurtosis, all of which fell within acceptable ranges ( $\pm 2$ ). Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine bivariate relationships among variables. To assess multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics were calculated; all VIF values were below 5, and tolerance levels exceeded .20, indicating the absence of problematic multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesised relationships between independent variables and the successful implementation of bilingual education. Both individual and full-model regressions were conducted to evaluate the relative contribution of each predictor. Standardised beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ),  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$  values, F-statistics, and significance levels were reported. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level. Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, anonymity was guaranteed, and no identifying information about respondents or schools was collected.

### Institutional Context

(Regulatory – Normative – Cultural-Cognitive)

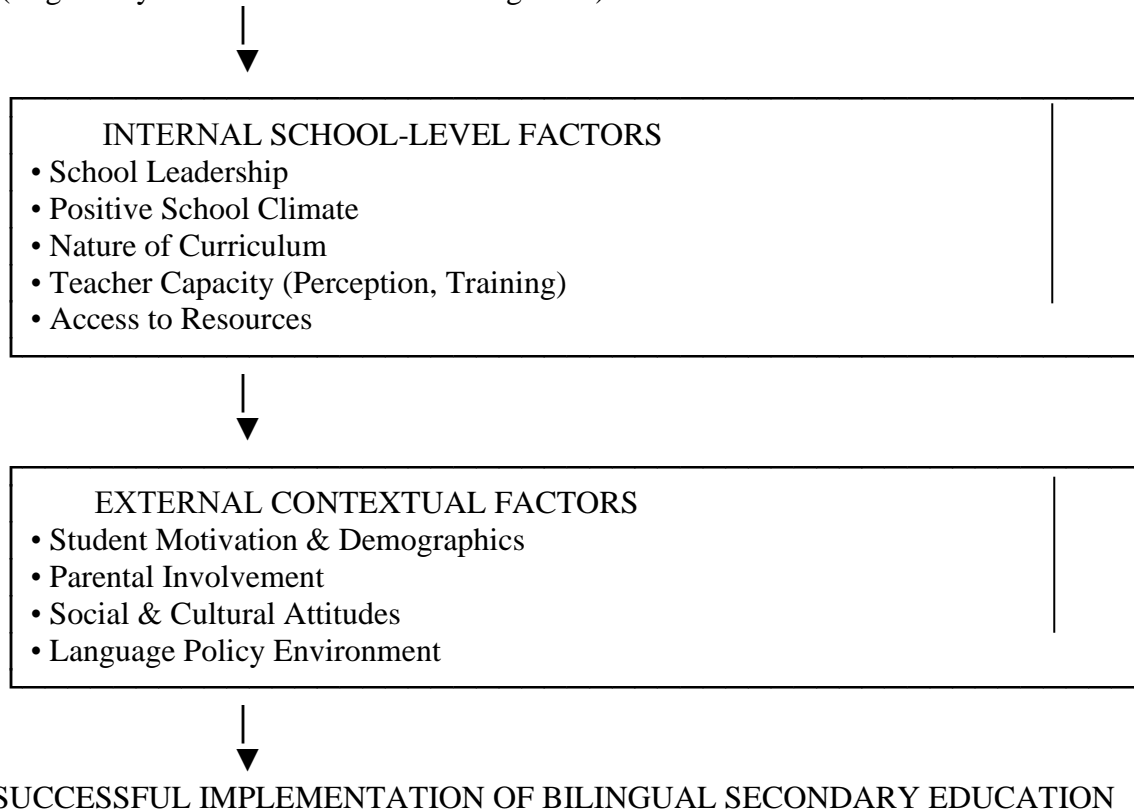


Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive determinants influencing successful bilingual secondary education implementation.

### RESULTS/ FINDINGS

Data screening indicated no missing values and no significant deviations from normality, with skewness and kurtosis statistics falling within acceptable thresholds ( $\pm 2$ ). Descriptive statistics revealed relatively high mean scores across all constructs, suggesting generally positive perceptions of the implementation of bilingual education among respondents. The dependent variable, successful implementation of bilingual secondary education, demonstrated the highest overall mean, indicating that participants perceived the program as moderately to strongly effective within their respective schools.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive associations between all independent variables and successful implementation ( $p < .05$ ). Internal school-level factors—including school leadership, positive school climate, teacher-related factors, curriculum design, and access to resources—demonstrated moderate to strong correlations with the dependent variable. Similarly, external contextual variables, student-related factors, parental involvement, sociocultural interests, and language policy support were positively associated with implementation success. None of the correlations exceeded .80, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern.

Multicollinearity diagnostics confirmed this assessment. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below the recommended threshold of 5, and tolerance values exceeded .20 for all predictors, indicating that the regression estimates were stable and reliable.

To test the hypothesized relationships, multiple regression analysis was conducted. The overall regression model including all predictors was statistically significant,  $F(1,1) = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ , explaining approximately 27.1% - 91.8% of the variance in successful implementation. The adjusted  $R^2$  value indicated that the model retained strong explanatory power after accounting for the number of predictors. This suggests that institutional and contextual factors collectively provide substantial explanatory insight into bilingual education implementation in the rural district examined.

Among the internal institutional determinants, teacher-related factors (perception, availability, and training) emerged as one of the strongest predictors of successful implementation ( $\beta = .684$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding indicates that teacher capacity and professional readiness are central drivers of the sustainability of bilingual programs. Access to resources also demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect ( $\beta = .579$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that infrastructural and material support remains a critical regulatory condition for effective implementation. School leadership exhibited a significant positive relationship with implementation success ( $\beta = .707$ ,  $p < .01$ ), reinforcing the role of administrative commitment in mediating policy enactment. Positive school climate and curriculum-related factors were also significant predictors, though with comparatively smaller effect sizes, indicating that while these elements contribute to implementation, their influence may operate in interaction with teacher capacity and resource availability.

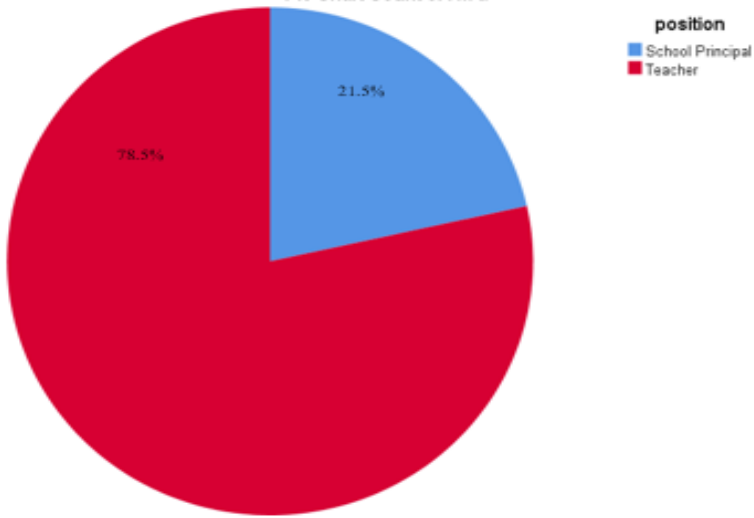
Regarding external contextual determinants, parental involvement showed a statistically significant positive effect ( $\beta = .831$ ,  $p < .01$ ), highlighting the importance of normative community support in sustaining bilingual initiatives. Sociocultural attitudes toward English and bilingualism were similarly significant ( $\beta = .607$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that cultural legitimacy and perceived social value of English-medium education influence school-level outcomes. Student-related factors, including motivation and attendance, demonstrated a positive, statistically significant relationship with implementation success ( $\beta = .958$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that learner engagement is an important mediating factor. Language policy support was also positively associated with successful implementation ( $\beta = .703$ ,  $p < .05$ ), though its effect size was comparatively smaller than teacher- and resource-related variables, implying that formal regulatory frameworks alone may be insufficient without corresponding school-level capacity.

When comparing standardized coefficients, internal institutional factors particularly teacher capacity and resource access accounted for a greater proportion of explained variance than external contextual factors. This suggests that while broader sociocultural and policy environments matter, implementation success in rural contexts is more strongly determined by school-level institutional capacity. The pattern of findings indicates that regulatory structures (policy and resources), normative forces (leadership and parental involvement), and cultural-cognitive dimensions (student motivation and sociocultural beliefs) operate simultaneously rather than independently.

Overall, all nine hypothesized relationships were supported at statistically significant levels. However, the relative strength of predictors varied, with teacher-related variables and resource availability emerging as the most influential determinants. These findings underscore the multi-dimensional nature of bilingual education implementation and highlight the importance of institutional coherence in rural educational contexts.

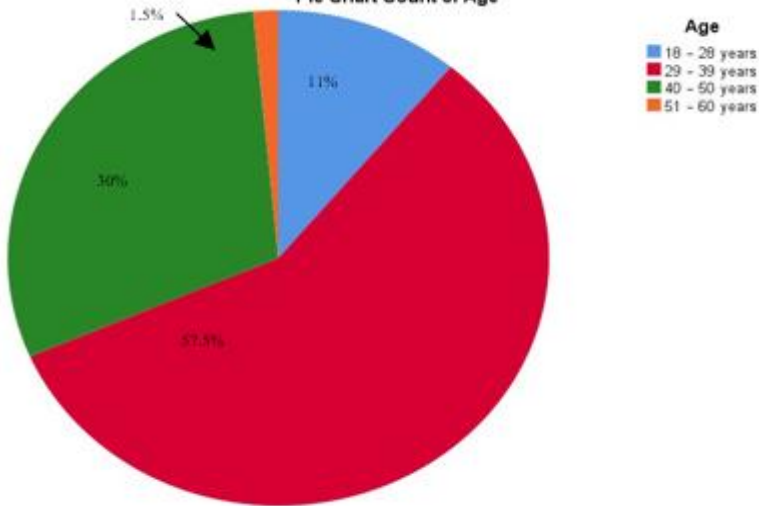
Sample Description

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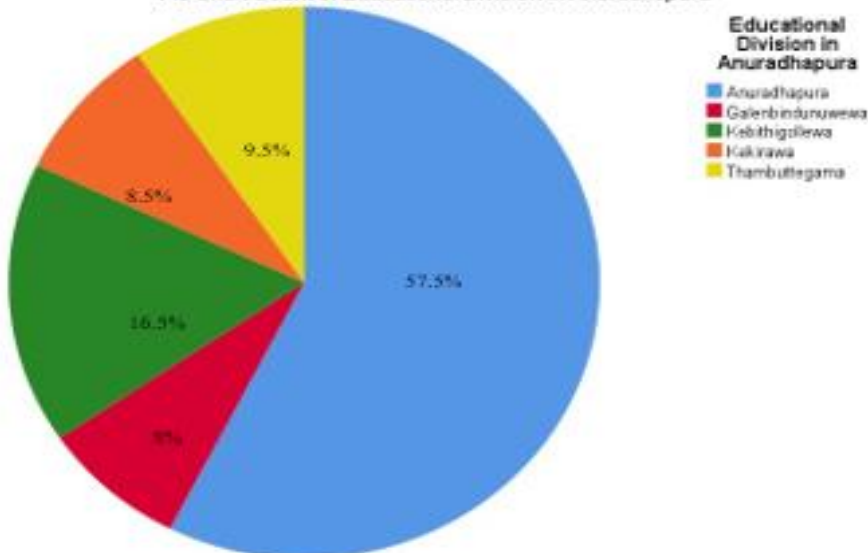


1.5%

Pie Chart Count of Age



Pie Chart Count of Educational Division in Anuradhapura



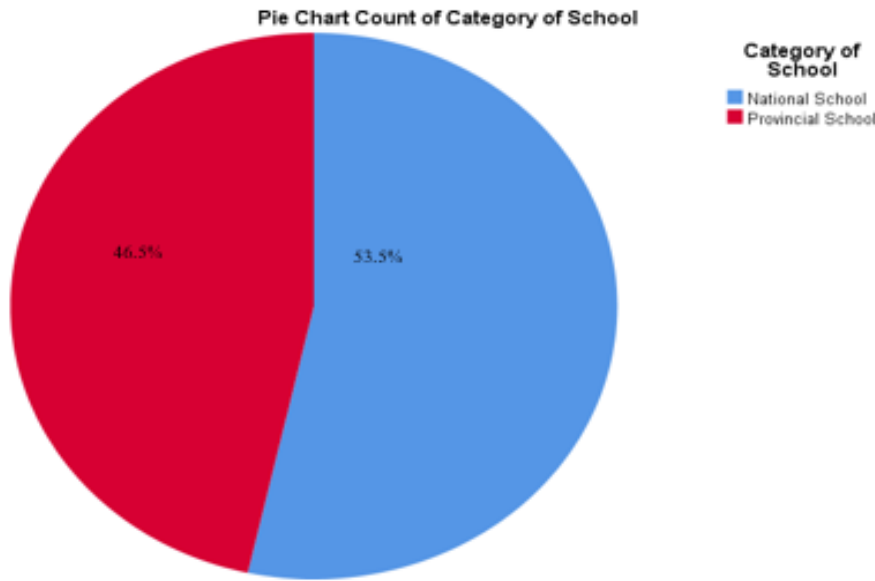


Figure 2: Sample Demographics - Source: (Survey Data, 2025)

The obtained data depicts that 78.5% of respondents were teachers and 21.5% were school principals. The highest rating fell to the age category of 29–39 years, which is 57.5%, 30% were at 40–50 years, 11% were 18–28 years, while 1.5% fell between 51–60 years of age. Meanwhile, 57.5% were from Anuradhapura Division, 16.5% from Kebithigollewa, 9.5% from Thambuttegama, 8.5% from Kekirawa and 8% from Galenbindunuwewa. About the type of school, 53.5% of the respondents were from national schools, while 46.5% were from the provincial schools.

### Descriptive Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Mode
PSC	200	12.0300	1.69809	12.0000	12.0000
SL	200	11.0800	2.32176	12.0000	12.0000
NOC	200	11.5200	2.11945	12.0000	12.0000
TD	200	11.4300	1.74940	12.0000	12.0000
AR	200	12.1000	1.84309	12.0000	12.0000
SD	200	11.1150	2.25994	12.0000	12.0000
PI	200	11.8650	1.83127	12.0000	12.0000
SCI	200	11.3200	1.95363	12.0000	12.0000
LP	200	11.3300	1.91558	12.0000	12.0000
SIBE	200	18.6600	3.37362	20.0000	20.0000

Source: Survey Data (2025)

Descriptive statistics show that all variables were measured on 200 valid responses with no missing data. As you can see, the mean values have a minimum of 11.08 and a maximum of 18.66, which depicts that the general trend of the responses was high and mostly concentrated around 12. The median and mode are consistently 12 across the different variables, indicating a symmetric distribution and consistent responses among respondents. The standard deviations range from 1.69 to 3.37, indicating moderate dispersion.

“Successful implementation of bilingual education” is the highest-dispersed variable. The overall descriptive results have shown that the dataset is well-structured, consistent and fit for further inferential analysis.

### Validity and Reliability Analysis

The KMO value of 0.783 and a significant Bartlett's Test ( $p < 0.001$ ) confirm that the data possess strong construct validity. Reliability analysis test indicates that all constructs had acceptable to excellent internal consistency. PSC recorded an alpha of 0.692, slightly below the ideal threshold but acceptable in an exploratory analysis, showing moderate internal consistency across its three items. The scale for SL yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.790, suggesting good internal consistency, while NOC revealed a high reliability of 0.776, implying a common concept measured by the items. SD had one of the highest reliabilities, at 0.874, which is very good and indicates that items within this construct are well aligned and measure the intended concept. SCI had a relatively low alpha value of 0.567, below the acceptable threshold, indicating that items are not highly correlated with the overall scale. Eventually, SIBE revealed the highest reliability coefficient of 0.878, which assured internal consistency and reliability for the items used.

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis**

	PSC	SL	NOC	TD	AR	SD	PI	SCI	LP	SIBE
Cronbach's Alpha	.692	.790	.776	.728	.811	.874	.753	.567	.744	.878
N of Items	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5

Source: Survey Data (2025)

### Hypothesis Testing

**Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Results**

Construct	R Value	R Square	Remarks
H1 - Positive school climate effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.520	0.271	Accepted
H2 - School leadership effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.707	0.499	Accepted
H3 - Nature of curriculum effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.657	0.432	Accepted
H4 - Teacher's perception, availability and training effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.684	0.468	Accepted
H5 - Access to resources effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.579	0.336	Accepted
H6 - Student perceptions, motivation, self-esteem, attendance effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.958	0.918	Accepted
H7 - Parental involvement effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.831	0.691	Accepted
H8 - Social and cultural interest's effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.607	0.368	Accepted
H9 - Language policies effects on the successful implementation of bilingual education.	0.703	0.495	Accepted

Source: Survey Data (2025)

According to the results, 27.1% and 49.9% of the successful implementation of BE are explained by positive school climate and school leadership, respectively. Further, 43.2% and 46.8% of the successful implementation of BE can be explained by the nature of the curriculum and teachers' perception, availability and training. Moreover, 33.6% and 91.8% of the variance in successful BE implementation can be explained by resource access and students' perceptions, motivation, self-esteem, and attendance. 69.1% and 36.8% of the successful implementation of BE can be explained by parental involvement and social and cultural interests. Finally, 49.5% of the successful implementation of BE could be explained by the effectiveness of language policies.

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## DISCUSSION

This study examined the institutional and contextual determinants of the successful implementation of bilingual secondary education in a rural Sri Lankan district. Drawing on institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008), the findings demonstrate that the implementation of bilingual education is not driven solely by policy mandates but rather by the dynamic interaction of regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces operating at the school level. The results provide empirical support for the proposition that institutional coherence, rather than isolated policy reform, is central to the sustainability of bilingual education in resource-constrained multilingual settings.

One of the most salient findings is the strong predictive role of teacher-related factors, including perception, availability, and professional preparation. This aligns with international EMI research, which consistently identifies teacher capacity as the primary determinant of instructional quality (Macaro, 2018; Dearden, 2015). In bilingual contexts, teachers are required to simultaneously manage content delivery and language scaffolding, a dual demand that intensifies cognitive and pedagogical complexity (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). The prominence of teacher-related variables in the present study reinforces Cummins' (2000) argument that additive bilingual success depends fundamentally on educator beliefs and competencies. In rural settings, where access to specialized training may be limited, teacher preparedness appears to function as the most immediate institutional lever influencing program success.

Access to resources also emerged as a significant regulatory determinant. Institutional theory conceptualizes regulatory structures not merely as formal policies but as material conditions that enable or constrain organizational performance (Scott, 2008). The findings suggest that infrastructure, teaching materials, and technological resources serve as tangible expressions of policy commitment. This resonates with UNESCO's (2020) observations that symbolic adoption of EMI reforms, without adequate resourcing, often leads to superficial implementation. In the rural Sri Lankan context, disparities in resource allocation may therefore explain variations in perceived effectiveness across schools.

Normative forces, particularly school leadership and parental involvement, also demonstrated meaningful influence. Effective leadership mediates between national policy expectations and classroom-level practice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The positive association between leadership and successful implementation suggests that principals play a pivotal role in fostering professional cultures supportive of bilingual education. Similarly, parental involvement reflects broader community endorsement of EMI as a pathway to social mobility. This finding aligns with Epstein's (2011) model of school-family partnerships and May's (2014) argument that community legitimacy is essential for sustaining bilingual initiatives. In rural areas, where schools often function as central community institutions, normative endorsement may amplify or constrain institutional reforms.

Cultural-cognitive dimensions, particularly sociocultural attitudes toward English and student motivation, were also significant predictors. These findings reflect the embeddedness of language education within broader ideological frameworks. English in postcolonial societies simultaneously symbolizes economic opportunity and historical inequality (Phillipson, 2009; Shohamy, 2006). The positive relationship between sociocultural interest and implementation success suggests that where English is perceived as socially valuable and identity-compatible, institutional initiatives encounter less resistance. Student motivation further mediates classroom engagement, reinforcing Dörnyei's (2009) assertion that language learning outcomes are strongly shaped by attitudinal and aspirational factors.

An important contribution of this study is demonstrating that internal institutional determinants exert greater explanatory power than external contextual variables. While language policy and sociocultural environments matter, school-level capacity appears to function as the decisive mediator translating policy into practice. This finding extends prior research by empirically operationalizing institutional theory's pillars within a rural South Asian context. Rather than treating bilingual education as a purely pedagogical innovation, the results illustrate how regulatory support (resources and policy), normative alignment (leadership and parental engagement), and cultural legitimacy (student and community attitudes) collectively shape implementation outcomes.

The fact that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant warrants careful interpretation. Rather than suggesting uniform strength across variables, the results indicate that bilingual education operates as an interdependent institutional ecosystem. In contexts where EMI has become socially desirable and nationally endorsed, multiple factors may simultaneously align to influence outcomes. However, variation in standardized coefficients demonstrates that certain determinants—particularly teacher capacity and resource availability—carry greater practical weight. This pattern underscores the importance of examining effect sizes rather than relying solely on statistical significance.

From a theoretical perspective, the study advances institutional theory by illustrating how its three pillars interact dynamically in educational reform settings. The findings suggest that regulatory policies without normative endorsement may lack sustainability, while normative enthusiasm without material support may produce implementation strain. Cultural-cognitive legitimacy appears to function as a stabilizing mechanism, aligning stakeholder beliefs with institutional objectives. This integrative understanding moves beyond linear cause-effect explanations and emphasizes systemic coherence.

Policy implications are equally significant. Efforts to expand bilingual secondary education in rural contexts should prioritize teacher professional development and equitable resource distribution before scaling enrollment targets. Policymakers must recognize that policy circulars alone cannot guarantee instructional quality. Investments in sustained teacher training, infrastructure development, and leadership capacity-building are essential. Additionally, engaging parents and communities through awareness programs may strengthen normative and cultural-cognitive support for bilingual initiatives.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and reliance on self-reported perceptions may introduce response bias despite procedural safeguards. Future research could incorporate longitudinal designs to examine sustainability over time and integrate student achievement data to triangulate implementation outcomes. Comparative studies across multiple districts would also enhance generalizability.

In sum, this study demonstrates that successful implementation of bilingual secondary education in rural Sri Lanka is best understood as an institutional phenomenon shaped by interacting regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces. By situating bilingual education within a broader organizational framework, the findings contribute to global debates on EMI expansion, institutional capacity, and educational equity in multilingual societies.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the institutional and contextual determinants of the successful implementation of bilingual secondary education in a rural district in Sri Lanka. Drawing on institutional theory, the findings demonstrate that the sustainability of bilingual education is shaped not only by policy mandates but also by the alignment of regulatory support, normative endorsement, and cultural-cognitive legitimacy. While language policy frameworks provide formal authorisation, it is school-level institutional capacity, particularly teacher preparedness and access to resources, that most strongly determines effective implementation. Leadership commitment and parental involvement further reinforce program stability, while sociocultural attitudes and student motivation function as critical mediating influences. By empirically operationalizing institutional theory within a rural South Asian context, this study contributes to global bilingual education scholarship in three important ways. First, it extends implementation research beyond dominant Western immersion and CLIL paradigms, offering evidence from a resource-constrained, postcolonial multilingual setting. Second, it demonstrates that institutional coherence rather than isolated reform efforts underpins program sustainability. Third, it highlights the centrality of teacher capacity and infrastructural equity in translating EMI policy into classroom practice.

The findings carry important policy implications. Expanding bilingual secondary education in rural contexts requires sustained investment in teacher professional development, equitable distribution of resources, and leadership capacity-building. Policymakers should move beyond symbolic adoption of English-medium instruction and focus on strengthening institutional conditions that enable high-quality delivery. Simultaneously,

fostering community engagement and reinforcing the sociocultural legitimacy of bilingual education may enhance long-term sustainability. Although the study provides robust evidence within one district, future research should employ longitudinal and comparative designs to examine how institutional dynamics evolve over time and across regions. Integrating student achievement measures and classroom observation data would further strengthen the understanding of implementation quality.

In conclusion, bilingual education reform in multilingual societies is fundamentally an institutional endeavor. Its success depends not only on linguistic aspirations but on the systemic alignment of policy structures, professional norms, material capacity, and community belief systems. Recognizing and addressing this institutional complexity is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable bilingual education outcomes.

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