

GLOBAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA



GARI International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN 2659-2193

Volume: 08 | Issue: 01

On 31st December 2021

<http://www.research.lk>

Author: Abdul Halik A.F, Rifka Nusrath G.M

T/Mu/Al-Hilal Central College, South Eastern University, Sri Lanka

GARI Publisher | Language | Volume: 08 | Issue: 01

Article ID: IN/GARI/ICPCM/2022/103 | Pages: 05-12 (07)

ISSN 2659-2193 | Edit: GARI Editorial Team

Received: 23.02.2022 | Publish: 31.03.2022

USE OF SECOND LANGUAGE FOR CO-EXISTENCE AND ETHNICAL RECONCILIATION AMONG THE CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN SRI LANKA

¹Abdul Halik A.F, ²Rifka Nusrath G.M

¹English Unit, T/Mu/Al-Hilal Central College, ²DELT, Faculty of Arts and Culture, South Eastern University, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is one of the countries with multiculturalism and multilingualism. The use of second language Sinhala/Tamil does build mutual understanding, brotherhood, social integration and ethnical reconciliation among the multicultural communities in Sri Lanka. This study explores how the use of second language creates ethnical co-existence and social harmony among multicultural society in Sri Lanka. This study was a descriptive survey research and quantitative approach was applied in data collection and presentation. In this study, 200 people from all the communities nationwide were selected as sample population through systematic sampling technique. The sample includes civil societies, religious leaders, community-based organizations, youths, academics and students. The research instrument of this study was a survey questionnaire. The findings-based conclusion of this study reveals that 76% of the participants were unable to speak the second language Tamil/Sinhala. As a result, 50% of the participants do not have cross-cultural relationship or friendship. Moreover, this study concludes that due to lack of second language proficiency, cross-cultural communication lacks which generates misunderstanding and misconception about other religions and their cultural practices, beliefs and customs. It instigates separatism and racism in the country.

Second language speaking ability can build positive cross-cultural communication which gives opportunity to understand other religions and their cultural value, and build ethnical harmony among multi-cultural communities in Sri Lanka. Lack of communication is the primary factor for separatism among multi-lingual people. The reason for communication barriers is lack of second language proficiency. Therefore, Based on the suggestions given by the majority of the participants, it is recommended that schools should include second language (Sinhala/Tamil) as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum from primary education, and establishment of schools based on religion and language should be banned.

Key words: Co-existence¹, Cross-cultural Communities², Ethnical Reconciliation², Second Language⁴

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is one of the South Asian countries which consist of multiple communities and languages. The multiple communities include Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Christians, Burger and Malay. Similarly, the multiple languages include Sinhala, Tamil, English and Malay. Moreover, a number of foreign languages are too spoken in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka seems to be a home to multi-cultural

communities, and it is the responsibility of the people across various religions, and communities to develop and maintain harmony with each other (Razick et al, 2020).

Accordingly, the current population of Sri Lanka is 2.2 million. The majority of the population is Sinhalese and Tamil whereas Muslim and Christians are minority of the population. Further, there are major three languages spoken in Sri Lanka; Sinhala language is spoken as the first language; Tamil and English Language are spoken as second language in Sri Lanka. The current status of Sinhala language is national and official language whereas Tamil language is second official language and English language is recognized as a link language.

Sri Lanka provides equal privileges to all the religions and honour their principles, cultural value, religious beliefs and practices, and customs and followings. However, misunderstanding and misconception on other religions are generated by certain majority and minority individuals. As a result, racism and separatism are promoted by certain fundamentalists.

It occurs due to lack of communication and mutual relationship between communities. When there is positive communication among the cross-cultural communities, people will have an opportunity to learn about other religions and their significant principles, cultural value and religious practices. There shall be fewer possibilities for misconceiving other religions. Therefore, language has been the medium for human communication. In this sense, to communicate with multi-communities in Sri Lanka, second language proficiency (Sinhala and Tamil) has been significant.

Therefore, it is obvious that second language skills seems important to communicate between majorities and minorities in Sri Lanka, and build peace,

co-existence and reconciliation among the cross-cultural communities.

Objectives of the study

In this study, the following objectives are addressed according to the primary aim and problem of the study.

1. To investigate how the second language (Sinhala or Tamil) proficiency builds co-existence and ethnical reconciliation among the multi-cultural communities in Sri Lanka

2. To explore whether lack of second language proficiency among the cross-cultural community generates misconception about other regions and their religious practices, cultural values and customs

Research questions

In this study, the following questions are formulated based on the problem of this study. They are as follow.

1. Does the ability of speaking second language (Sinhala or Tamil) build co-existence and ethnical reconciliation among the cross-cultural communities in Sri Lanka?

2. Does lack of second language (Sinhala or Tamil) skills generate misunderstanding and/or misconception about other regions and their religious practices, cultural values and customs?

3. How can second language skills be improved among the individuals in Sri Lanka and built co-existence and reconciliation among the cross-cultural communities in Sri Lanka?

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited with second languages Sinhala and Tamil since Sri Lanka's second languages are both Sinhala and Tamil. Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural country. Therefore, the need of ethnical harmony was emphasized in this study. The participants of this study were limited with 200 individuals across the nation; 50 individuals were limited from each community. Moreover, the research instruments were limited with a Google

Form to access the participants across the island easily.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents review other relevant sources. There are various local and international studies which have been previously conducted in relation to use of second language for social integration and co-existence, and ethnical harmony. In this sense, according to Rifka (2022), people mingled with each and everyone except North and East part of Sri Lanka. These two provinces are mostly covered with Tamil only speaking people but there are some multilingual or bilingual-speaking people. However, language is the most prominent communicating agent to express what you feel exactly. The person who knows more than one language, he /she posses with him more than one shadow of personalities. So that the languages are to be learned as well as, the languages should be learned adequately (Rifka, 2022). Therefore, use of more than one language helps us not only develop personality but also cross-cultural understanding and relationship.

Further, according to Coleman (2015), human interaction requires communication and language provides the means of communication. Hence, the link between identity, language and social cohesion becomes evident. (Coleman, 2015). Thus, to communicate and interact with people, human should have language. When individual lives in multi-cultural and multi-lingual country, they should be able to speak their first and second languages.

Coleman (2015) further asserts that the Tamil language has long been widely used in Sri Lanka, yet, for decades it was overshadowed by the monopoly of Sinhala, the language that represented the dominant ethnic group. Tamil was marginalized at many levels as the

language itself was said to carry an ethnic baggage that was identified to be the political consciousness of a particular community (Coleman, 2015). As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, Sinhala language is spoken by the majorities whereas Tamil language is spoken by the minorities in Sri Lanka. Since the minorities' language is marginalized by certain majorities, most of the Sinhalese are unable to speak Tamil language. Similarly due to lack Sinhala speaking environment, most of the Tamils and Muslims unable to speak Sinhala language. This is the primary reason for split between communities.

Further, as reviewing another study, Bannett, (1990) states that an approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values that foster cultural pluralism; in its most comprehensive form, it is a commitment to achieving educational equality, developing curricula that build understanding about ethnic groups, and combating oppressive practices. Further, According to Wedikandage, (2014), the need for careful consideration of ways to foster greater multilingual competence among both teachers and students if Sri Lanka is to reach its goal of greater intercultural understandings and communication between the various ethnic groups. Wedikandage, (2014) further finds that language was a major concern in multicultural classrooms, partly because some students could not communicate effectively in Sinhala medium, and partly because they themselves were not always fluent in both national languages.

According to the review of other relevant studies, the findings and conclusion obviously present that language has been a prominent part in building ethnical harmony and introduction of second language (s) in classroom will help both students and teachers improve their second language speaking ability.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methods and materials used in this study. They are described under different subtitles.

Research design

This study was a descriptive survey research. This study aims at exploring how the ability of second language skills (Sinhala and Tamil) builds co-existence and ethical reconciliation among the multi-cultural and multi-lingual communities in Sri Lanka. In this study, quantitative approach has been applied in data collection and data presentation. Further, systematic sampling technique was chosen to collect the sample population. The data analysis methods were both descriptive and statistical.

Sample population

In this study, 200 individuals were selected nationwide to carry out the opinion survey, and 50 individuals were selected from each religion (Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Christian). The participants include: religious leaders, academics, students, social activists,

community-based organizations and civil societies.

Research instrument

A survey questionnaire was chosen as the data collection tools of this study which was designed to gather opinions among the participants. The questionnaire consisted of nine close-ended questions and one open-ended question. The questions focused on participants' religion, second language speaking ability (Sinhala/Tamil), relationship with multi-cultural communities and use of second language proficiency to build coexistence and reconciliation as well as the suggestions to develop second language skills among the people in Sri Lanka.

Data collection procedure

The opinion survey was gathered using a Google Form. The Google Form link was sent to the selected participants with necessary instructions. In particular, clear instructions and explanations were given to those who are unable to read and understand the questionnaire. The participants were interested in responding to the Google Form questions and fully supported for data collection

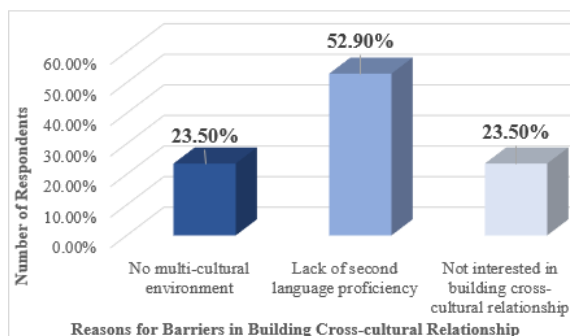
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This section presents the major findings of the questionnaire with the aim of achieving the objectives the study.

Reasons for the Barriers in Building Cross-cultural Relationships

The following bar chart presents the factors that hinder for not having relationship with cross-cultural communities in Sri Lanka.

Figure 1 - Reasons for the Barriers in Building Cross-cultural Relationships



According to the above findings, it is obvious that the primary barrier in building cross-cultural relationship in Sri Lanka is due to lack of second language (/Sinhala/Tamil) speaking ability. Majority of the participants (52.9%) had mentioned that lack of second language proficiency was one of the key barriers in communicating and building relationships with multi-cultural and multi-lingual people in the country. Environment takes a prominent part in acquiring/learning a second language. Therefore, another factor for the barrier in building cross-cultural relationship was due to lack of multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment. As far as North-East part of Sri Lanka is concerned, the majority of the population is Tamil-speaking communities. Their ethnical group includes Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Similarly, Southern, Western and North-Central part of Sri Lanka is concerned; the majority of the population is Sinhala-speaking communities.

However, minorities' first language, Tamil is neglected by majorities for learning. Most of the Sinhalese communities in the North-Eastern part are unable to speak Tamil whereas most of the

Tamil-speaking communities in North-Central part can speak Sinhala well. Language is the mode of communication; Human cannot build understanding and relationships between multi-lingual communities without communication. Due to lack of Sinhala/Tamil language speaking ability, majority of the people do not build relationship with other communities. Positive communication and understanding is the basis for building cross-cultural relationships and co-existence. It would be a path to learn about other religions and their culture, belief, customs, practices and followings. Strong understanding of other religions and communities may build ethnical harmony and co-existence.

The primary reason for criticizing other communities and their religious practices, cultural value and beliefs is due to cross-cultural relationship. Hatred talks generate racism and violence. Therefore, there are a number of riots and violence take place between communities in the country.

Participants' Response to the Questionnaire

The following table shows participants' response to the questions in the questionnaire.

Table 1 - Participants' Response to the Questionnaire

N	Questionnaire questions	Participants' Response				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	“Second language proficiency of our country is vital to build ethnical reconciliation among the multicultural and multilingual communities in the country”. Do you agree with the above statement?	40%	33%	12%	4%	11%
2.	“Due to lack of second language proficiency and communication, misconception and misunderstanding are created about the value of other religions, religious practices and customs, and cultural value”. Do you agree with the above statement?	31%	43%	9%	10%	7%

3.	“Positive communication with majorities and minorities in Sri Lanka can build co-existence and ethnical reconciliation. So, to communicate with majorities and minorities, second language Sinhala and Tamil language proficiency is important”. Do you agree with the above statement?	52%	31%	5%	9%	3%
4.	Do you agree that every individual in the country should have second language proficiency to build brotherhood and to understand the value of other religions?	46%	29%	7%	7%	11%

According to the above findings based on the analysis of participants’ opinions, second language proficiency among the cross-cultural and multi-lingual communities is significant for building reconciliation in the country. Lack of Sinhala/Tamil language skills has been a barrier for communication between different communities and different people which generates a split between minorities and majorities. They lose the opportunity to build cross-cultural relationships with other communities in Sri Lanka and to learn about other religions. Insufficient knowledge and understanding of other religious practices and cultural value generates misconception about other religions and communities and conflicts.

Therefore, the findings are apparent that reconciliation and co-existence among cross-cultural communities can be built through second language skills.

Based on the opinion survey of the participants, every citizen of the country should learn his/her second language (s). The educationists and curriculum designers should include second languages (Tamil and Sinhala as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum from primary stage. Therefore, they will develop their second language from primary stage. According to innate theory of Noam Chomsky and Critical Period Hypothesis of San Eric, the child should develop their language skills

before puberty (Age of 13). Thus, the introduction of Sinhala/Tamil language (s) from primary level will help the students develop their language skills.

CONCLUSIONS

This study can be concluded based on the findings that second language proficiency (Sinhala/Tamil) is significant for everyone in the country to grow cross-cultural relationship. As a result of lack of second language speaking ability, people fail to communicate with other communities, and build positive relationships. So that second language ability will be an opportunity to understand other communities’ religion and their cultural value, religious practices, customs and principles. Misunderstanding and misconception about other communities occur due to lack of communication. Use of second language (Sinhala/Tamil) can build co-existence and ethnical harmony in the country when there is positive communication takes place between other communities.

Further, according to the suggestions given by the participants, the issue of lack of second language skills in Sri Lanka can be overcome and the second language ability among all the communities can be enhanced when the followings are implemented.

- Schools in Sri Lanka should implement second language (Sinhala/Tamil) as a compulsory subject in school curriculum from primary level.
- Establishment/function of schools based on ethnicity, religion and language should be banned.
- The government, civil society organizations and community-based should organize second language training programmes, cross-cultural understanding and religious co-existence programmes for students, youth and employees.

REFERENCES

- Banks, J. A. (1991). "A curriculum from empowerment, action and change", in C.E. Sleeter (Ed.). *Empowerment through multicultural education.*, Albany: State University press New York.
- Coleman, H. (2015). "Language and social cohesion in the developing world". *British Council & Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.*
- Razick, A. S., Fowsar, M. A. M & Mihilar, A. K. (2020). "Factors Affecting Ethnic Harmony between Sinhalese and Muslim Communities in Post-war Sri Lanka: A Study Based on South Eastern University of Sri Lanka". *Journal of Politics and Law, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 1 – 10.*
- Rifka Nusrath.GM, (2022). *Contributing First Language in Learning Second Language: A comparative study between Sinhala and Tamil Language (Unpublished)*
- Wedikandage, N. P. (2014). *A study of multicultural practices in Sri Lankan secondary schools and an English comparator school Lanka. [Thesis degree of Doctor of Philosophy]. University of Bedfordshire.*

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

This survey is designed to gather opinions among the cross-cultural communities in Sri Lanka regarding the use of second language (s) Sinhala and Tamil in building co-existence and ethnical reconciliation in the country.

Therefore, kindly cooperate for this opinion survey to achieve the objectives of the research. Your information will be confidentially treated.

Select the most appropriate word and underline.

1.Which community do you belong to?

- Sinhalese
- Hindu
- Muslim
- Christian

2.Are you able to communicate with multicultural communities using your second language Sinhala or Tamil?

- Yes
- No

3.Do you have any relationship or friendship with cross-cultural communities in Sri Lanka?

- Yes
- No

4.If so, how long have you been in relationship with cross-cultural communities?

- For 1 year
- For 3 years
- For 5 years
- For more than 5 years

5.If not, why do you not have such relationship or friendship with cross-cultural communities?

- No multicultural environment
- Lack of second language proficiency
- Not interested in building relationship with cross-cultural communities

6. "Second language proficiency of our country is vital to build ethnical reconciliation among the multicultural and multilingual communities in the country" do you agree with the above statement?

- Yes
- No

7. "Due to lack of second language proficiency and communication, misconception and misunderstanding are created about the value of other religions, religious practices and customs, and cultural value." do you agree with the above statement?

- Yes
- No

8. "Positive communication with majorities and minorities in Sri Lanka can build co-existence and ethnical reconciliation. So, to communicate with majorities and minorities, second language Sinhala and Tamil language proficiency is important." do you agree with the above statement?

- Yes
- No

9. Do you agree that every individual in the country should have second language proficiency to build brotherhood and to understand the value of other religion?

- Yes
- No

10. How can the second language skills be developed in our country? Give your suggestions and recommendations