Original Paper

Redefining the Role of the Second National Language Teacher: Existing Perceptions vs. Changing of Practices

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Abstract

Sri Lanka is a multicultural country with a diverse population coming from three major ethnic groups, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Though they have been living together for several centuries in the country, it is not without conflict. After three decades of an atrocious war which erupted as a result of these ethnic clashes, currently the country is enjoying some peaceful times. To make this peace last for long the government has taken several important measures and teaching the second national language in the school for children, and appointing the first language speakers as the second national language teachers is one of the most important. Nevertheless, second national language teachers have a very different interaction with their students when compared to other teachers. They are required of an unusually high level of cultural nuance as members of a different culture to their students and need to develop cultural intelligence to overcome this challenge. This study attempts at finding the present cultural perceptions of these teachers and suggesting ways of changing practices to bridge this gap.

Keywords

cultural perceptions, intercultural competence, intercultural teaching competence, pre-service teacher training, CALD students

1. Introduction

Iceland is considered to be the only culturally homogeneous country with a population of 94% of Norse/Celtic descendants and only 6% population with a foreign origin, which is the exception (Tennekoon, 2001). Everywhere else we find situations with cultural admixtures of varying sorts and degrees and co-existence of differences. Thus, no teaching system operates in a homogenous society; they operate in culturally complex, heterogeneous and pluralist societies. As a result, the education systems are not culturally neutral. The subjects taught, the content of them and the methodologies used, are influenced by the society outside. Nevertheless, the goal of education should be to construct a new

society where each respect and value the different cultural identities of the other citizens rather than promoting discrimination and cultural bias in a multicultural society.

As multicultural country Sri Lanka needs citizens who show an interest in building positive and equal relationships with other cultures. The education needs to ensure that students are prepared to understand their neighbours, who are members of other language communities. Learning another Language open doors for mutual appreciation, understanding and respect. On the other hand, students who learn other languages also gain insights into other cultural perspectives, and intercultural competency, which is defined by many scholars as the ability to communicate in culturally appropriate ways, while showing appreciation and understanding of others, and maintaining a spirit of openness and respect for others, the context based definition of this researcher is, "Intercultural competence means acquisition of knowledge, formation of real life skills and transformation of attitudes necessary to communicate across cultural boundaries with minimum conflict" (Tennekoon, 2021, p. 148).

Thus, Sri Lankan government has made a timely move by introducing second national language at the early stage of the student's educational journey and it was also wise to appoint the native speakers of each language to teach them to the students. However, this is not an easy job for the second national language teachers as they have to face a new challenge of teaching students from cultures different to their own. Thus, these teachers need intercultural teaching competence to handle the students coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to that of their own.

1.1 What is Intercultural Teaching Competence

According to Dimitrov et. Al (2014, p. 89) Intercultural teaching competence is "the ability of instructors to interact with students in a way that supports the learning of students who are linguistically, culturally, socially or in other ways different from the instructor or from each other, across a very wide definition of perceived difference and group identity. He further clarifies that Intercultural teaching competence enables instructors to bridge cultural, linguistic or other differences in the classroom, communicate successfully across disciplinary cultures (Dimitrov, 2012), and to establish meaningful relationships with and among students in order to facilitate learning and promote student engagement.

This research project addresses the issue of intercultural teaching competence in second national language education by identifying how interculturally competent are these second national language teachers' by assessing their perceptions on culturally different others and how they handle culturally different students in the class. It is believed that the teaching of culture is intertwined with the teaching of language and if cultural information of the language context is incorporated in the presentation of language it would greatly increase the benefits of language study. Language teachers teach and students learn about the culture of the language whether or not it is not included directly in the curriculum. Thus, one area that needs to be addressed is how the perceptions of both teachers and students impact on culture learning in language learning contexts. Accordingly, the following research questions were selected to be focused during this project.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the present perceptions of student teachers on other cultures?

2. Are they interculturally competent to teach students coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

2. Do they perceive culture is an integral part of learning and teaching of the second national language?

3. Do the teachers use any cultural material to teach the second national language in the classroom?

4. How effective are the resources used by the 2 NL teachers to develop intercultural competence of their students?

5. What methods do 2NL teachers use, and how successful are they to promote intercultural competence of students?

2. Methodology

This research was carried out at Maharagama National College of Education, one of the nineteen National Colleges of Education in Sri Lanka which function as pre-service teacher education institutes. They train prospective teachers in different subjects to be deployed in the system of schools in Sri Lanka. The training period is of three years and in the third year trainees are attached to a school for their internship during which they work as a permanent member of the teaching staff. In this research the major focus is the teacher training course meant for prospective teachers of Second National language. They will be teaching Sinhala to Tamil speaking students in Tamil medium schools.

2.1 Research Design

The research used mixed method approach and carried out in two basic stages. In the first stage an attempt was made to identify the present perceptions of the total number of student teachers in the course on the culturally different others. In the second stage randomly selected sample of the student teachers were observed during their teaching practice sessions in order to identify how they handle their students in the classroom such as using of any cultural material in order to make the students acquainted with the culture of the second national language and develop their intercultural competence. To triangulate the results finally there was a discussion with student teachers about their experiences such as the effectiveness of resources, methodologies and how students responded to their lessons and how successful the teachers were teaching and students were learning the target language and the culture. Finally, the researcher made an attempt to come out with suggestions and recommendations in order to understand the existing shortcomings and change the future practices in second national language teaching and learning in Sri Lanka.

The data collected was used not to support or refute any particular hypothesis, but to clarify certain ideas and concepts related to intercultural competence and intercultural teaching competence. Therefore, the following methods were used for collecting the empirical data and the opinion of many intercultural scholars that the best way to assess intercultural competence is through a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures (Deardorff, 2006, p. 250) was also taken into consideration in

doing so.

- Observation
- Questionnaire
- Focus group interviews

2.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a very popular way of gathering information because they are cheaper and easier to use even in the large scale and the responses can be quantified using sophisticated statistical techniques. However, to get useful responses in a cost effective way it is important to have clear aims. As Munn and Drever (1990) quotes there are many advantages using questionnaires.

- Efficient use of time
- Anonymity
- High return rate
- The possibility to standardizing questions

However, in this research, questionnaires were used as it provided for the opportunity to collect information on attitudes and perceptions of a large number of student trainees in the shortest possible time.

The questionnaire used here consisted of sixteen questions which was based on three major areas. The questions from number one to five were aimed at finding personal information of the student teachers. The questions six to fifteen were directed to derive information that could have some impact on intercultural teaching competence of the students. The sixteenth question consisted of sixty statements that spread on the intercultural competence continuum specified by Bennet (1993) which has six stages basically divided into two, i.e., "ethnocentric stages" and "ethnorelative" stages. There are three stages to be precise denial, defense and minimization in the ethnocentric phase and the other three namely acceptance, adaptation and integration are in the ethnorelative phase. The sixty statements were designed in such a manner they fell into either of the six stages and they were equally distributed in a set of thirty statements for each of the two phases. It was prepared on the Likert scale based on five ratings from strongly agree to strongly disagree on sixty items. Half of them were ethnocentric statements and the other half ethnorelative statements. The marks were given in such a way that the respondent needed to acquire more than 35 marks to be rated as in the ethnorelative continuum.

2.3 Observation

Observation as it stands is a broad label, a general and even vague umbrella term used for many and varied purposes and interpretations (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Nevertheless, in research it is done with intention. In this research observation was used as a tool to understand the nature of the teaching behaviour of the participants during their teaching sessions. It was utilized as a method of enriching or supplementing the data gathered by other two methods too. Therefore, a colleague teaching the same subject was used as an observer and she used a checklist for logging the observations. Observation checklist was designed based on the pyramid model (Deardroff, 2006) and five factor

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model (Byram, 1993). The checklist (Tennekoon, 2021) was divided into three different components, i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes and a rubric system was devised to quantify the observed behaviours and thereby to allocate a total mark for each student for each lesson. The researcher too observed the lessons and maintained a journal to note her reflections.

2.4 Focus Group Interviews

A focus group is a situation where a focus group moderator keeps a small and homogeneous group of 6-12 people focused on the discussion of an issue (Denscombe, 2007; Bell, 2005). This technique of data collection was used in this research because focus groups are useful for exploring about how people think of an issue and to collect in depth information from the participants. Semi structured interviews were conducted with randomly selected student teachers. Although a readymade schedule was in hand the questions were more or less open ended providing the opportunity for the researcher moderator to probe and clarify the answers further. The purpose of these interviews was to understand and describe the nature of student participation in the classroom setting.

2.5 Data Analysis Methods

Since both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were chosen for the study, the researcher was compelled to use both quantitative and qualitative methods for data analysis too. Quantitative data analysis is a powerful form of research emanating in part from positivist tradition of research and usually used in large scale research. Nevertheless, it can also be effectively used in small scale research like this. Since the researcher was making an attempt to quantify the cultural perceptions of the participants of the research using numbers the quantitative analysis was used for data gathered from the questionnaire and the observation checklist.

The descriptive statistics that do exactly what they say, i.e., describe and present data and used to talk about them further. Specifically, the attitudinal scale with sixty items in the questionnaire were assigned values from (+)2 to (-)2 that carry five responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The total score of the participant is counted and mean score was found out in order to comprehend the position of each one of them in the intercultural development process defined by Bennet (1993). By looking at the total number of pluses and minuses it could be worked out exactly on which step in the particular phase the participant is on specifically as denial, minimization, etc. The open ended questions in the questionnaire were worked out using interpretive reading. That means a particular version of data was evolved as to understand what it meant or represented. Through the literature review and the conceptual framework some patterns have emerged and these patterns were made use of to interpret them which is termed as "pattern coding" (Deardroff, 2005). The observational checklist also carried numeric rubrics and it is also analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statics such as mean and standard deviation. Both the questionnaire and the checklist were validated in a previous research (Tennekoon, 2021) of the researcher and fit to use in this research too.

The data from classroom proceedings logged in the reflective journal of the researcher and the check list used by the colleague observer. The key objective of maintaining the reflective journal notes was to

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log on teacher behaviours and class activities. The data collected from them were analyzed using content analysis method. Content analysis is a systematic technique for grouping and compressing many words of written or oral text into a much smaller amount of text (Krippendorff, 2004). The findings of the focus group interviews were transcribed, charted and analyzed in order to identify connection between student teacher's answers and the answers to the research questions.

The research **question 1** aimed at finding the cultural perceptions of the student teachers at the onset of the research by trying to understand whether their perceptions were more inclined towards ethnocentrism or ethnorelativitism. Accordingly, the findings from Questionnaire 1 is discussed first because it helped in identifying the cultural perceptions of the respondents.

3. Findings of the Questionnaire

3.1 Personal Information

The personal information related to the respondents is as follows.

The sample was expected to be consisted of student trainees coming from different parts of the country. The following table shows the composition of the sample based on different provinces.

Table 1. Distribution of the Sample by Provinces

Province	No of students	Percentage
Southern	16	34.04
Northern	00	00.00
NorthWestern	07	14.89
Western	12	25.53
Central	01	02.12
North Central	04	08.51
Eastern	03	06.38
Uva	02	04.25
Sabaragamuwa	02	04.25
Total	47	100

The sample shows the highest number of students come from Southern Province the least number of students come from Central Province and there is a fair representation from other parts of the country. However, there were no respondents from Northern Province of the island. The reason was that there is a National Colleges of Education situated in this province with the same course most probably student teachers have opted for that.

The student teachers in the sample group are very young and their ages lied in between the range of 21-25 years.

Table 2. Age Distribution of the Sample

Age in years	21	22	23	24	25	Total
No of students	07	19	18	02	01	47
Percentage	14.89	40.42	38.29	04.25	02.12	100

When taking into consideration the student teachers highest proportion, i.e., 40.42 of the sample were about 22 years of age and about 38.29% of the sample were of 22 years of age and the smallest proportion 02.12% were of 25 years.

Although it would have been better if the sample consisted of males too all were females as in Sri Lanka only few males join the teaching profession.

They can be categorized based on their ethnicity and religion as shown below. If there were much larger numbers from minority ethno-religious groups, it would have been helpful to increase the confidence of the findings but unfortunately only one Tamil student (02.12%) of the sample came from minority ethnic and religious groups because of the government policy of recruiting native speakers to teach the second national language. However, the only one Tamil student here has studied in Sinhala medium.

Table 3. Table Distribution of Sample According to Ethnicities

Ethnicity	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslims	Total
No of Students	46	01	00	47
Percentage	97.87	02.12	00	100

When looking at the table it can be understood that in the sample Sinhala students formed the majority with 97.87% which is almost total of it. When the religious representation was considered it was noticed that the sample consisted of only three major religious groups in the country, i.e., Buddhists, Hindus and Roman Catholics. However, there were very few of student teachers from other religions when compared with majority group the Buddhists.

Table 4. Distribution of Sample According to Religion

Religion	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Roman Catholic	Total
No of students	42	01	00	05	47
Percentage	89.36	02.12	00	10.63	100

As mentioned above the majority of the sample were Buddhists with a high representation of 89.36%. The second place was taken by the Roman Catholics with 10.63% and the smallest percentage was Hindus with 02.12% and no one from the Islamic.

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3.2 Findings of the Background Information from the Questionnaire 1 that Supposed to Have Impact on Intercultural Competence

One of the most important factors the researcher's attention was paid was the language competence of the respondents since it was expected that the language competence of the students might have contributed to their intercultural competence since the ability of communicating with other cultural groups may give an opportunity to understand them better.

Though Tamil is one of the two official languages, and the second National Language of the country and also a compulsory subject in the Secondary curriculum the sample showed very poor competence in Tamil. Most of the students who had competence in Tamil came from Tamil and Muslim communities whose first language was Tamil. The fact is clearly depicted in the table below.

Table 5. Tamil Language Competence of the Sample

	Competent	Not Competent	Total
No of students	04	43	47
Percentage	08.51	91.48	100

Sinhala, which is spoken by the majority Sinhalese too is one of the two official languages and second national language of the Tamil speaking communities and a compulsory subject in the secondary curriculum as well. May be because of the nature of the course everyone was competent in Sinhala.

Table 6. Sinhala Language Competence of the Sample

	Competent	Not Competent	Total
No of students	47	00	47
Percentage	100	00	100

The table shows that the whole student teacher sample population has competence in Sinhala. It is a compulsory requirement as all these teachers will be teaching Sinhala to Tamil speaking students in school.

Since English is given the role of the link language according to the constitution of Sri Lanka it is expected to make happen the communication between the two different language communities who are not competent in each other's language. Thus, to realize this objective English is taught at the school from grade one to twelve. Though nobody from the student teachers declared may be because of lack of confident that they were excellent in English competence, everyone has claimed they are competent in English. Thus, the English language competence of the sample was of 100%. The above information is clearly exemplified in the following table.

Table 7. English Language Competence of the Sample

	Competent	Not Competent	Total
No of Students	47	00	47
Percentage	100	00	100

However, when the mean score of the attitudinal scale was compared with the language ability it was clear there was no relationship between language competence and intercultural competence. Even those who were good at the second language (Sinhala for Tamils and Tamil for Sinhalese) and English have scored low marks from it and all respondents were in the ethnocentric stage.

When talking about their experiences related to intercultural contact out of the total 47 from the sample, only four people which is almost 12.9% had travelling abroad experience and twenty of them, which is approximately 64.5% had previous contact with other cultural groups during school or in neighbourhood.
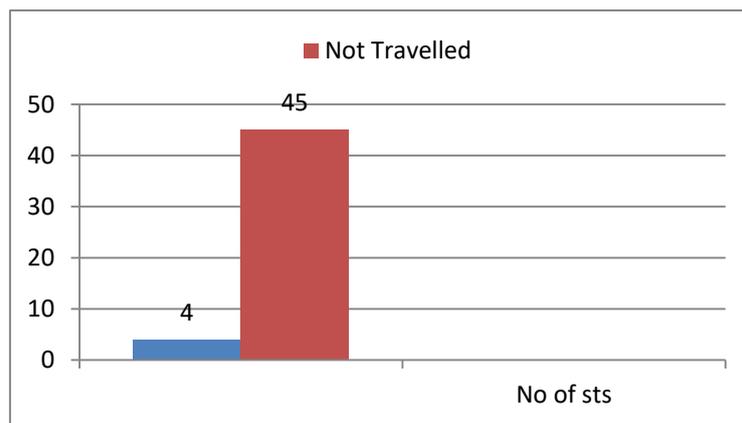
Figure 1. Foreign Travel Experiences of the Sample

Out of the eleven students who did not have previous cultural contact in the second year sample all were Sinhala Buddhists. Those four student teachers who have travelled aboard have scored higher marks from the attitudinal scale when compared them with others, nevertheless they also were in the ethnocentric stages.

Therefore, it can be concluded that when compared with the marks they have obtained from the attitudinal scale at the onset of the research, foreign travel or previous intercultural contact had no significant influence on their present perceptions of other cultures.

The question "how do you prefer to be described as" aimed at finding the notions of the sample about their "identity" derived some interesting answers. The researcher assumed that coming out with a positive answer indicates the sample's intercultural competence.

Table 8. Notions of Identity of the Sample

Identity	Sri Lankan	Sinhala	Buddhist	Total
No of Students	35	06	06	47
Percentage	74.46	12.76	12.76	100

When the second year sample is analyzed it could be observed that more than 2/3 that means 35 students preferred them to be identified as Sri Lankans which is about 74.46% of the sample population, comparatively a very high percentage. Six students, i.e., 12.76% described them as Sinhalese and Buddhists respectively, biased to their ethnic and religious identities. Thus, the notion of "Sri Lankan Identity" was revealed by the majority ignoring to be attached to their religion or ethnicity.
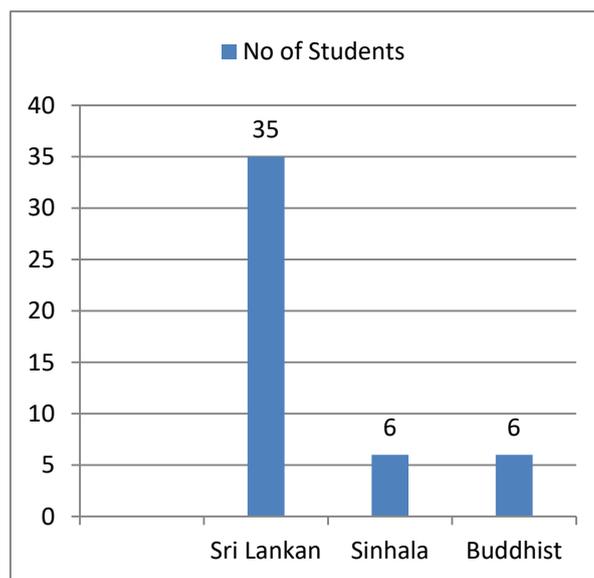
Figure 2. Notions of Identity

The fact that majority of students consider them as "Sri Lankan" is clearly exemplified by the above chart too.

Though the notion of identity revealed a positive picture, it was obvious that it had no impact on intercultural competence because this percentage did not reveal any connection to their intercultural competence, or making them more ethno-relative in nature. This became clearer when the sample was given the opportunity to select their best cultural identity from the next question.

As mentioned earlier, here too it was interesting to note that majority of the sample selected the religion as their cultural identity.

Table 9. Notions Related to Best Cultural Identity of the Sample

Cultural Identity	Religion	Ethnicity	Both	Language	Total
No of students	27	10	08	02	47
Percentage	57.44	21.27	17.02	04.25	100

When the sample is considered 57.44% of students declared religion as the significant aspect of their culture and 21.27% ethnicity. Only about 17.02% has considered both depicts their identity, yet only 04.25% has considered language as their cultural identity.
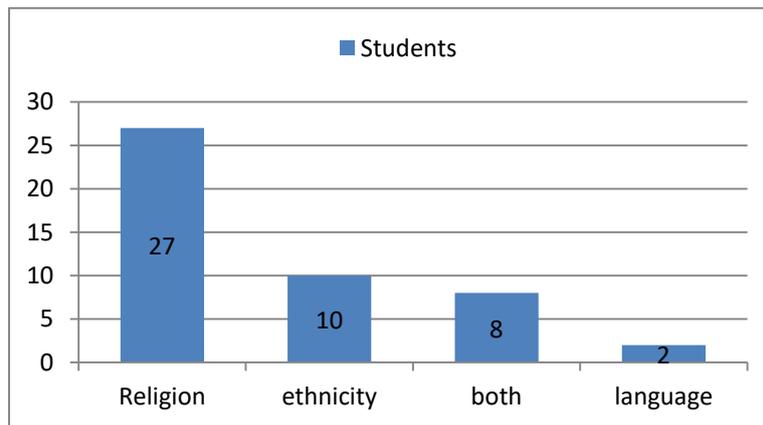
**Figure 3. Cultural Identity**

The above chart too clearly shows the notion of the majority by indicating religion as their cultural identity and the ethnicity has become the next important aspect of cultural identity of the sample.

When talking about one's culture half of the sample twenty-six student teachers revealed ethnocentric attitudes and twelve students' ethnorelative attitudes. The other seven had neutral attitudes from the student teachers.

Table 10. Attitudes of Culture of the Sample

Attitude	Ethnocentric	Ethnorelative	Neutral	Total
No of Students	26	12	07	47
Percentage	55.31	25.53	14.89	100

If the numbers are given in percentagewise, 55.31% students bore ethnocentric attitudes, 14.89% neutral attitudes and just 25.53% students.
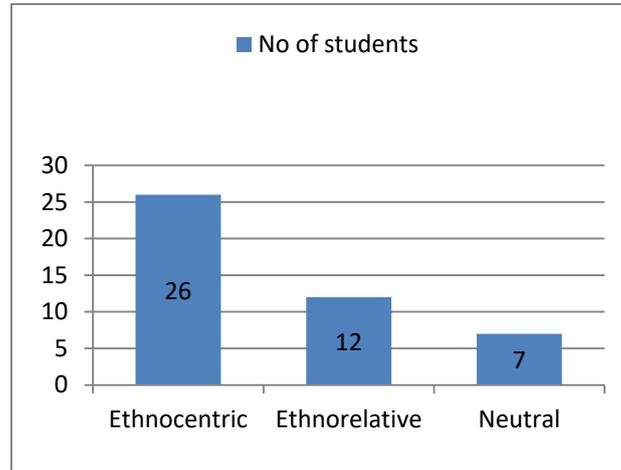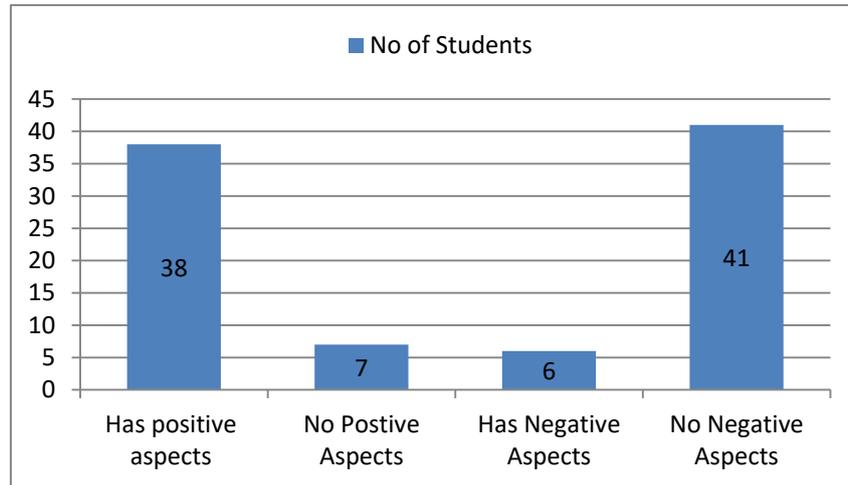
Figure 4. Attitudes towards Culture

The above chart provides clear evidence that first year students are much more ethnocentric when compared with the second years.

Another aspect of looking at a person's cultural bias is to check how they perceive their own culture. Many people view their culture as having positive aspects totally and other's cultures as having lot of negative aspects. The next question was set with the objective of measuring such cultural bias.

Table 11. Attitudes of the Sample towards Their Culture

|	Has positive aspects	Has no positive aspects	Has negative aspects	Has no negative aspects
No of Students	38	07	06	41
Percentage	80.85	10.63	12.76	87.23

The table shows a large proportion of students, thirty-eight in number and 80.85% in percentage said their culture had positive aspects as a whole. Only seven, i.e., 10.63%, claimed no positive aspects in their culture as whole. Six students that means more than 87.23% of population said their culture has negative and they claimed believing myths, outdated ideas, and discriminating women as these negative aspects and 87.23% claimed their culture had no negative aspects.

Figure 5. Attitudes towards One's Own Culture

Thus, it can be concluded that majority are biased towards their own culture. Further, it is understood that the average student teacher believes their culture has more positive points than negative points. It indicates how bias they are towards their own culture.

The next question too, aimed at finding cultural bias of the sample by getting them to nominate a culture they don't like.
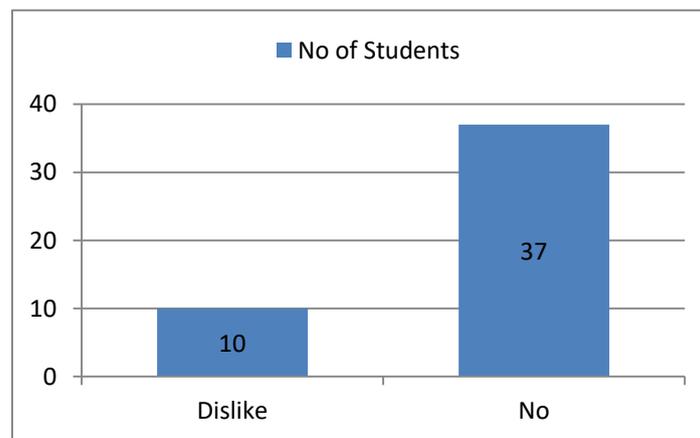

Figure 6. Notions of the Sample towards Other Cultures

When asked from the second years whether they have some other cultural group they dislike thirty-seven answered as "no", which approximately a 78.72% of the sample. Another 21.27%, ten students in number answered as "yes".

The next question was set in order to identify whether the students know what 'Intercultural Competence' is. Thirty-one students, i.e., 65.95%, claimed they have no idea. Eleven students, which means 23.40% had given closer definitions, and five, a 10.63% had tried but failed from the sample.

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The list of characteristics they had in their list were incorrect in four students. But two students had some characteristics closer to accurate ones and twenty-one claimed they have no idea.
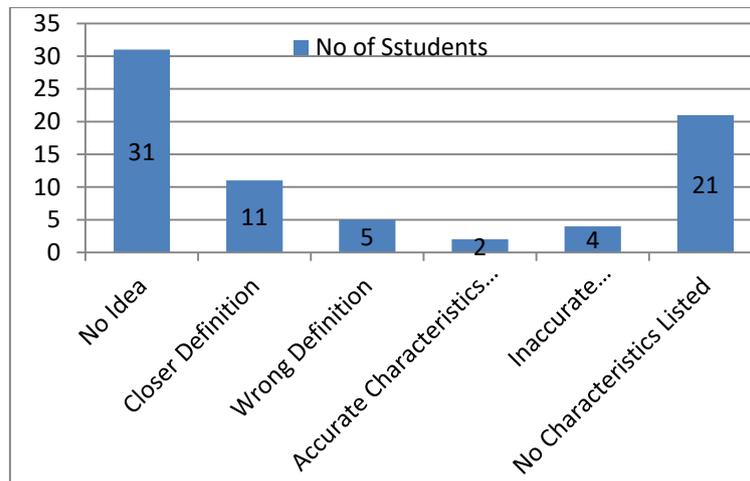
Figure 7. Notions of the Sample about What Intercultural Competence Is

3.3 The Findings of the Attitudinal Scale

The twentieth question was based on an attitudinal scale of cultural perceptions. The objective of it was to identify whether teacher trainees have ethnocentric or ethnorelative attitudes. Each statement was given the appropriate mark based on its stage as described in the Research Methodology chapter and these marks are analyzed now.

Table 12. Scores of the Attitudinal Scale

Name	Score	Name	Score
Gayani	36	Saraswathi	23
Vajira	47	Piumi	11
Kamani	11	Gauravi	35
Maya	39	Parami	35
Ramani	08	Nirmala	06
Sanduni	24	Wasanthi	16
Aruni	19	Wathmi	28
Wathsala	13	Sarani	11
Uditha	11	Saranya	13
Shashika	36	Bodhi	34
Ranuli	29	Vayani	13
Srini	18	Naduni	17
Nadee	33	Kalani	31

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Yuvini	24	Padmi	23
Jayani	32	Sandamali	31
Vinuki	16	Senani	22
Ruvini	16	Lalani	23
Nuwani	23	Chathuri	09
Kumudu	33	Kavindi	12
Ganga	51	Mangali	12
Namali	39	Wasana	20
Patali	30	Parami	19
Dinethi	23	Rashmi	31
Dewmi	12		

When discussing about the marks obtained by the second year sample it was observed that the highest score was 51 and the lowest was 06.

The mean score of the total sample was 23.02 which is only the half of the required score. The highest number of student scores lie in the range of 11-20 which is of 35.5% of the total population. The mode of the score was 33.

In relation to First Year sample's score the highest mark obtained was 38 and the lowest was 05. The both were obtained by Sinhala Budhdhist students. The highest score of Muslims was 44 and the lowest was 08. Highest score of Tamils was 25 and the lowest was 19. Highest score of Roman Catholic's was 29 and the lowest was 19. The mean score of the Sinhala Buddhists was 19.18. The mean score of Tamils was 22 and the Muslims 29.5. The mean score of Sinhala Roman Catholics was 25.

The highest number of scores lied on the range of 21-30 which consisted of 38.29% of the population.

The range of scores of the total sample, and the mean score of each ethnic group varied as resented in the tables below.

Table 13. Mean Score of the Sample

Range	No of students	Percentage
0-10	03	6.38
11-20	18	38.29
21-30	11	23.40
31-40	13	27.65
41-50	01	2.12
51-60	01	2.12
Above 60	00	00
total	47	100

The highest percentage of student scores, i.e., 38.29% of the sample lied in between 11-20 and very much below the margin of gaining intercultural competence. The lowest percentage, 2.12% of the second years lied in between 40-60.

Thus all charts and tables exemplified the fact the majority of student teachers are more inclined towards ethnocentrism.

Further, the findings from the Questionnaire 1 especially the attitudinal scale shows the cultural perceptions of the student teachers are more inclined towards ethnocentrism which means they believe their culture is superior to others' at the beginning of the intervention and they even did not know what intercultural competence is.

3.4 Findings of the Teaching Practice Sessions

Randomly selected ten teacher students were observed during their teaching practice students in order to find out whether they have intercultural teaching competence. To facilitate this process two strategies were used namely the observation checklist used by the colleague observer and the reflective journals maintained by the researcher and the student teachers.

3.5 Findings of Reflective Journal Entries

The summary of the findings of the reflective journals entries confirmed that student teachers had very much 'culture centred' opinions and when teaching to the other culture students they completely have neglected the fact their students coming from another culture and they are not familiar with the culture of the target language. In lessons they used only few cultural material that would have improved the knowledge, intercultural skills (apart from language knowledge) and positive attitudes of the target culture.

3.6 Findings of the Observation Checklist

The Observation Checklist was maintained by the outside observer during the activities. Through the checklist it was tried to quantify intercultural competence by allocating a mark for different components of it. Thus, a rating system was given to each component as follows.

- Inadequate - 1
- Minimal - 2
- Moderate - 3
- Extensive - 4

For each activity discussed above the checklist was used for observation and student teachers s' knowledge, positive attitudes, and skills of the other culture (Tamil) exhibited were observed and a mark was given. After each lesson the marks of the individuals were totalled up.

4. Analysis of the Focus Group Interview

For meaningful data analysis the same ten student teachers' participation from each batch was sought for the focus group interviews. When analyzing the focus group interviews carried out with the sample all comments were transcribed into statements against each protocol question. And then main ideas that

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occurred in the answers were noted and critically analyzed for finding themes which were same as in the journal entries. The following were the themes that emerged from the focus groups interviews.

"the lessons provide very few opportunities to learn about the target culture(Sinhala) to the students"

"Student teachers possessed limited knowledge of the culture of their students"

"teachers did not make any attempt to learn about the culture of the students while working with them"

"the activities used by teachers did not help much to improve the critical thinking abilities of the students about the way they look at the people, things etc. of the target culture"

"no attempt was made to inculcate positive attitudes of the students towards the target culture or its people" teachers' behaviours, perceptions were very much biased to their own culture"

"no attempt was made to develop intercultural competence of the students"

"no attempt was made by the teachers too, to develop their own intercultural competence"

By looking at the above statements it can be observed that the it was understood that the opportunity of intercultural contact made possible in the second national language classroom was not utilised to develop intercultural knowledge, positive attitudes towards the other culture, intercultural skills and critical cultural awareness of the participants. A previously conducted research by this researcher herself has proved that when people are opened to other cultures and consciously be aware of it they develop their intercultural competence according to the following cyclic model (Tennekoon, 2021).

Cyclic Model of Intercultural Competence
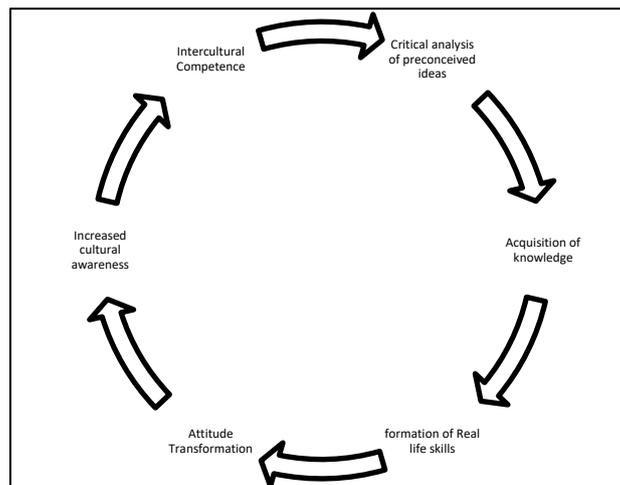
Thus, when the overall picture is considered, it can be concluded that the participants in the research did not respond to the intercultural contact opportunity in any positive way to develop their own or students' Intercultural competence.

5. Recommendations

The major purpose of this research investigation was to construct an understanding of the current perceptions on cultural differences of prospective teachers of second national language (Sinhala) and to

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find out an effective way of developing the intercultural competence of teachers in the second national language classroom in order to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for them to handle culturally and linguistically diverse students they meet in their future practice.

Therefore, the cultural perceptions of these student teachers were studied intently by analyzing the findings of the Questionnaires with the attitudinal scale and later their practice was assessed by exploring their responses to the classroom activities through the feedback from the journals and observation checklist of the outside observer and the reflective journal of the researcher in order to see how they face the challenge of handling CALD students in the practical context.

It was obvious that Second National Language Learning in Sri Lanka has neglected the intercultural dimensions of the process and inadequately prepare the prospective teachers for the challenges in their real life. It is a proved fact today that language use which is more of a communication tool than that of a linguistic tool. Thus, it is high time we include intercultural aspects to our language learning programs.

Second National Language teacher training in our country has not paid any attention to the challenges encountered by these teachers as they are constantly required to cope with culturally and linguistically diverse students in their language classrooms. Therefore, second national language teacher training courses must be prepared to address the intercultural competence both theoretically and practically in their teacher training courses through curriculum, syllabi and pedagogic revisions.

7. Final Comment

Therefore, one timely need of policy makers in education in Sri Lanka is to incorporate intercultural competence as goals in every field related to language education such as curriculum design, material development and teacher training etc. and promoting research in the field in search of new and better ways of learning and teaching second national language which are more beneficial to our own context because at this very moment we are passing through an important moment in our history and if we let it elude through our fingers we will never be able to survive as one nation with one national identity which is precisely exemplified by the following statement by Barak Obama, the President of the Unites States. "*Our very survival has never required greater co- operation and understanding among all people from all places than at this moment in history ... when we open our hearts and our minds to those who may not think like we do or believe what we do - that's when we discover at least the possibility of common ground*" (Barack Obama, Notre Dame, 2009).

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