

Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Otherness in Sri Lanka: Bridging the Gap in ELT Interculturality



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Abstract Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country where schools are segregated based on medium of instruction. However, the teachers of English are increasingly being required to work in schools where the medium of instruction is not their mother tongue and students come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Therefore, communication across cultural boundaries has become a prerequisite for their professional competence. This research is an attempt to identify whether the teachers of English trained by pre-service teacher education institutes in Sri Lanka possess this mandatory competency. The chapter reports findings from a mixed method study carried out in a College of Education in Kalutara district. Data include an attitudinal survey based on a purposive sample of 63 first- and second-year teacher trainees to ascertain their intercultural sensitivity. Findings revealed that the majority of the student teachers have negative perceptions of cultural diversity which would ultimately have a negative impact on their teaching. The present chapter suggests practical ways to overcome this challenge with a specially designed curriculum and introduces a context-based definition of intercultural competence.

Keywords Cultural perceptions · Intercultural competence · Pre-service teacher training · Cultural and linguistic diversity · Sri Lanka

1 Introduction

Out of the many benefits of education it is perceived that developing intercultural citizenship can be rated amongst the highest as it helps one to survive in a diverse world. Education can pave the way to developing solidarity in an ethnically divided

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society like Sri Lanka inculcating knowledge, skills and especially attitudes necessary to survive in a plural society where the majority group, Sinhalese, make up 74.9% of the population; the Tamils, who are an ethnic group, form 9.3% of the population according to the latest official statistics (Census of Housing and Population Sri Lanka, 2012). The history of the country demonstrates the continued antagonism between different ethnic groups as evidenced in the 30-year long ethnic war between Tamil militant groups and the Sri Lankan armed forces with the Sinhalese majority. Recent ethno-religious conflicts, such as the anti-Muslim riots undertaken by extreme Sinhala-Buddhist *Bodhu Bala Sena* groups (the Buddhist Power Force) in 2014, which were the result of a wave of Islamophobic rhetoric and violence against the Sri Lankan Muslim community, and the terrorist Easter Sunday attacks in 2019 by radicalised Muslim extremist groups (*National Tawheed Jamaat*), show the growing polarisation of the Sri Lankan political scene, based on racial, religious and ethno-nationalist identity politics. Thus, it has become an important need of the Sri Lankan educational system to make their citizens interculturally competent in order to establish complete peace among them.

One way of promoting peace is to educate citizens to combat prejudice and develop intercultural competence (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). English language teachers should be trained to develop in their students a sense of compassion and empathy towards cultural others (Lynch, 1992). In other words, as Lynch stated, education should

foster social literacy including the intercultural competence to relate creatively to the diversity of human cultures, to give awareness of the way in which human conflicts arise at the personal, inter-group and international level and to develop the ability to resolve conflicts creatively and justly, combat prejudice, discrimination and social injustice wherever they arise (p. 32).

Thus, this chapter discusses what intercultural competence is and how it is developed in prospective teachers of English studying in a preservice teacher education course. It describes an intervention in the form of an intercultural syllabus and proposes some pedagogical recommendations for future changes.

According to Hammer et al. (1978), intercultural competence is “the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways” (p. 422). Lustig and Koester (2003) stress three key elements of intercultural competence: interpersonal and situational context; the degree of appropriateness and effectiveness of the interaction; and sufficient knowledge, motivation and action. Specifically, they emphasise that competence is dependent on “the relationships and situations within which the communication occurs” (p. 65). Thus, in its broadest sense, intercultural competence can be defined as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2009, p. 12). Fantini further notes that the “effective” aspect relates to the individual’s competencies and the “appropriate” aspect to the receiver’s perception of the speaker’s competencies and states that there are four dimensions to intercultural competence: knowledge, skill, attitude, and awareness.

Hence, it is in this context that Deardorff (2004) attempts to document consensus among top intercultural scholars and academic administrators on what constitutes intercultural competence and the best ways to measure this complex construct, thus representing the first crucial step toward definition and measurement. According to her findings, intercultural competence is defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 247). This is the working definition used throughout this research.

The present chapter seeks to give a clear picture of key components of intercultural competence (IC) as delineated in the relevant literature by showing their relevance in the Sri Lankan context, e.g., by promoting IC as a desirable outcome of English language teaching and learning. Specifically, it tries to understand what it means to be interculturally competent, how to develop IC in student teachers and how to identify the best ways to measure it. Therefore, the following research questions were addressed.

1. What are student teachers’ current perceptions of cultural diversity?
2. How would they respond to an intervention which would provide extensive opportunities that promote a greater understanding of intercultural issues?
3. Which strategies used by the researcher in curriculum implementation are most effective in enhancing prospective teachers’ intercultural competence?

Consequently, the study’s objectives are as follows, the aim being to achieve them through the proposed intervention.

- Evaluate the student teachers’ current perceptions of cultural diversity and determine whether they are more inclined towards “ethnocentrism” or “ethnorelativism” (Bennett, 1993).
- Assess how effective is the specially designed intercultural curriculum in developing the intercultural competence of pre-service teachers of English.
- Identify the most and least effective activities in the intercultural curriculum designed to enhance the student teachers’ intercultural competence; and propose a course of action accordingly.

2 Research Context

This research was carried out in a National College of Education (NCOE), one of the nineteen pre-service teacher education institutes that train teachers to be deployed in the Sri Lankan school system. The training period is of 3 years and in the third-year trainees are placed in schools for their practicums during which they work as ‘tenured’ teachers. However, the NCOE in which the research is conducted is different from other National Colleges where the medium of instruction is

the mother tongue, because pre-service teachers from all three major ethnic groups study together here as the medium of instruction is English. Therefore, this has provided a unique opportunity to promote intercultural competence in Sri Lankan teacher education programs. In here, there are about four hundred residential students at any time of the year, representing all three major ethnic groups (but with a majority of Sinhala students), which necessitates the use of English as a lingua franca in such an intercultural situation. Nevertheless, it is observed that rather than developing intercultural relationships, student teachers tend to opt for more ethno-linguistic comradeship.

2.1 The Sample

The sample is composed of 63 student teachers from both first and second year of their residential course in the NCOE. The second-year group had spent more time in the institution and there was a chance of them being more interculturally competent due to their exposure to more cultural diversity. To determine the impact of cultural diversity, a first-year sample too was selected from the freshers. Two classes were selected from the 2 years purposely as they manifest the highest ethnic diversity in the college. Since the research methodology was more qualitative in nature, using purposive sampling techniques assured ample representation of different cultural groups to match the purpose of the research. The representation of ethnic groups in the sample is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

When looking at Table 1, it is clear that in the second year Sinhala students formed the largest proportion with 74.19%, which is almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the whole sample. Next came the Muslim students with 19.35% and the smallest number was the

Table 1 Distribution of sample according to ethnic/religious affiliations

Ethno-religious identity	Tamil		Muslim		Sinhala	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
No. of Students in Second Year	2	6.45	6	19.35	23	74.19
No of Students in First Year	3	9.38	6	18.75	23	71.88
Total	5	7.91	12	19.05	46	73.03

Table 2 Distribution of sample according to religion

Religion	Hindu		Buddhist		Islam		Roman Catholic		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
No. of Students in Second Year	2	6.45	20	64.52	6	19.35	3	9.68	31
No of Students in First Year	2	6.25	21	65.63	6	18.75	3	9.38	32
Total	4	6.35	41	65.08	12	19.05	6	9.53	63

Tamils with 6.45%. The first-year student sample also consisted of more Sinhala students with 71.88% and the smallest number coming from Tamils with 9.38% while the Muslim participants represented 18.75%.

When the religious representation was considered, it was noticed that the sample consisted of major religious groups in the country (i.e., Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Roman Catholics). However, there were lesser numbers of student teachers from other religions when compared with majority group, the Buddhists (see Table 2).

The majority of both 1st and 2nd year student teachers were Buddhists (i.e., 64.52% and 65.63%, respectively). They were followed by the Muslims, with 19.35% in the second year and 18.75% in the first year. Roman Catholics represented 9.68% in the second year and 9.38% in the first year. The least represented were the Hindus, who were 6.45% in the second year and 6.25 in the first year. The first cycle of the research was implemented with the second-year teacher trainees and the second cycle was implemented with the first-year teacher trainees. The intervention was carried out over a period of 3 months for the first cycle and 6 months for the second cycle respectively, with 8 hours of contact lessons per week for each class.

2.2 Research Design

This study is aiming at changing a situation as well as studying a phenomenon. Therefore, it is a sort of action research. Action inquiry was chosen for several reasons. First, action research seeks not only to understand and interpret the world but to change it (Cohen et al., 2007; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) and as such it clearly suited this study's purpose of using education for social change. Second, it is expected that all involved educational stakeholders would benefit from such an endeavour in their actual context of practice by developing the required knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours during the process. Furthermore, a main difference between action inquiry and other research paradigms is that "knowing becomes a holistic practice and that theory is lived in practice and practice becomes a living theory" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 35). Traditionally, the difference between theory and practice is exaggerated in that research is supposed to give priority to knowing through thinking whereas application is knowing through doing. However, such demarcation is viewed as obsolescent because both fields complement each other (Darder et al., 2003). Both theoretical and action research paradigms require rigour and objectivity. Social reality is characteristically 'subjective' and discursively constructed, especially in the field of education because education is always a value laden activity.

2.3 *Mixed Method Approach*

A classroom-based research study was conducted with 63 student teacher participants, using both quantitative and qualitative methods in the data collection and data analysis. According to intercultural scholars, the best way to assess intercultural competence is through a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures (Deardorff, 2006, p. 250). In action research everything that happens in the setting could be described and used as data, and could be interpreted to understand behaviour. Therefore, the following data collection methods were used in this research: attitudinal scale, observation, reflective journals, student diaries and field notes.

2.4 *Attitudinal*

The attitudinal scale was used as it provided the opportunity to collect information on attitudes and perceptions of a large number of student trainees in the shortest possible time. It consisted of sixty statements spread on the intercultural competence continuum specified by Bennett (1993) which has six stages basically divided into 'ethnocentric' and 'ethnorelative' orientations. There are three ethnocentric stages (i.e., "denial," "defence" and "minimization") and three ethnorelative stages, namely "acceptance", "adaptation" and "integration" (Bennett, 1993, p. 46). The sixty statements were designed in such a manner that they fell into one of the six stages, and they were equally distributed into a set of thirty statements for each of the two phases. The Likert attitudinal scale was adapted, based on five ratings from strongly agree to strongly disagree on sixty items. Half of the attitudinal statements were ethnocentric statements, and the other half were ethnorelative. The marks were given in such a way that the respondent needed to acquire more than 35 marks to be rated, for example, on the ethnorelative continuum.

2.5 *Observation*

Observation was used as a tool to understand the nature of changes that occur in the participants. It was utilised as a method of enriching or supplementing the data gathered by other methods. Therefore, a colleague teaching the same subject was used as a non-participant observer and her field notes were analysed and compared with those of the researcher in order to find answers to the research questions. There was a checklist too used for logging the observations. The observation checklist was designed based on the pyramid model (Deardorff, 2006) and five factor model (Byram, 1997). The checklist 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.

2.6 Student Diaries, Observer Field Notes and Researcher's Reflective Journal

Narrative accounts play an important role in classroom-based qualitative approaches, and therefore one of the main data sources was the reflective journal maintained by the researcher. All observations related to “what happened in the classroom” were documented in this journal together with the thoughts and personal reflections of the researcher. Journal entries were basically divided into three categories and logged under three columns: (a) what actually happened in the class, (b) what the researcher thought about what happened and (c) what she learnt from what happened. Student teachers were also instructed to keep a diary during and after the class to document their reflections about the class activities. The non-participant observer too maintained a field notebook and both of these were divided into columns, same as the reflective journal of the researcher for the purposes of comparing and contrasting the observations entered.

2.7 Intervention

The intervention was done in the form of a curriculum specially designed with intercultural material. The first cycle of action was conducted with the sample from the second years. Based on the feedback from it, a second cycle was conducted with the first-year students. The intercultural materials aimed at teaching students English language skills from an intercultural perspective. English language skills are taught for 8 hours a week for both first and second years in the 2-year training period. However, this special intercultural syllabus was followed for 3 months with the second-year trainees and 6 months with the first-year trainees. The period consists of sixty-hour contact sessions with the second-year students and 100 hours with the first years. The rationale of the course was to improve the four skills of English (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Although there is a set syllabus for English with specified competencies and lists of topics, no detailed content is prescribed such as a particular textbook or a course of lessons. Thus, this ‘gap’ provided an opportunity to design the researcher’s own materials referred to as the “Intercultural Syllabus”. These intercultural materials were carefully selected to develop student trainees’ attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness necessary to improve intercultural interactions, taking the findings from the literature review into consideration. Since the target of the activities was to increase the critical cultural awareness and sensitivity to otherness of the student teachers while improving their English language skills, the content of the activities was on social and cultural information that promotes reflections on intercultural issues. The ultimate goal was to help student teachers to establish successful interactions with people from other cultures using English. There was a

Table 3 Sample activities

Competency Level
Identify writer's purpose and infer implied meaning [Reading]
Use English creatively and innovatively in written communication [Writing]
Report ideas and views clearly and concisely [Listening]
Apply critical thinking skills to determine bias/accuracy of information presented orally and make decisions. [Speaking]
Description of the activity and the procedure implemented
Display the title of the poem "culture clash" by Sally Odger and get the students to predict the content. Put the rest of the poem on the board and get them to complete the task sheet individually. Discuss whether they agree with the poet's ideas. Ask them to write a similar poem based on their personal experiences. [Reading]
Ask the students to work in groups and comment on pictures by describing, interpreting and evaluating their responses. The rationale is to decipher cultural predispositions that govern the perception of social reality. [Writing]
Students listen to "The Story of Abigail" and then arrange the characters in their order of preference by taking into consideration how they behaved in the story. First, they do it individually and then in groups and present the agreed list to the class and justify their choices. [Listening]
Students are presented with some pictures of Indian culture and are required to predict what they are about. Students then discuss their personal opinions about Indian Culture, both negative and positive. Next, they watch the film "Outsourced" and find out situations in which Mr. Todd, an American who got himself appointed to a company as a manager in India, is in trouble with Indian culture and how he manages to come out of it finally. After that, students select one of the incidents and explain to the class how they would have reacted in such a situation. Students also discuss and emphasise the qualities and characteristics that helped Mr. Todd to adjust to India. [Speaking]

pre- and post-discussion session for each activity to develop participants' critical thinking. The details of some activities are given in Table 3 to illustrate the nature of the intervention activities.

3 Data Analysis

The data of this study are presented based on two categories. One is quantitative data and the other is qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected from the questionnaire and the checklist. The qualitative data were collected from the reflective journal of the researcher, field notes of the non-participant observer and diaries of the students. These data were analysed in such a manner that they answer the primary concerns of this research i.e., to understand the cultural perceptions of the student teacher participants at the beginning and the end of the intervention and how they have responded to the intercultural syllabus. It also allowed the researcher to understand better strategies and material that were more effective in developing intercultural competence of the student teachers. How the data are analysed is described under each data collection tool as follows.

Table 4 Scores of the attitudinal scale

No	Ethnicity/religion	Second year		First years	
		Student's name	Score	Student's name	Score
1	Tamil Hindu	Maha	37	Abinaya	33
2	Tamil Hindu	Nihamath Hayam	30	Radha	32
3	Muslim	Farvin	16	Zinda	29
4	Muslim	Nuzrath	18	Ruzaira	
5	Muslim	Fazeeha	11	Zaina	08
6	Muslim	Raza	35	Fathima Manal	35
7	Muslim	Hazeena	30	Zeenath	29
8	Muslim	Maf	16	Hazeema	44
9	Sinhala Catholic	Jacky	11	Ann	
10	Sinhala Catholic	Gabrielle	09	Mar	19
11	Sinhala Catholic	Maf	06	Sharmane	
12	Sinhala Buddhist	Ashaya	29	Shadsavi	25
13	Sinhala Buddhist	Sachi	28	Sara	29
14	Sinhala Buddhist	Radeeka	11	Shenali	21
15	Sinhala Buddhist	Induwari	13	Sherin	12
16	Sinhala Buddhist	Samanthi	34	Manel	18
17	Sinhala Buddhist	Upamali	06	Vimeka	22
18	Sinhala Buddhist	Randhi	26	Pahansilu	18
19	Sinhala Buddhist	Samadhi	17	Udaka	21
20	Sinhala Buddhist	Nishu	31	Saumya	22
21	Sinhala Buddhist	Sadeesha	29	Dineni	09
22	Sinhala Buddhist	Saranya	16	Samanali	30
23	Sinhala Buddhist	Tharika	16	Chichee	36
24	Sinhala Buddhist	Samudini	25	Thilini	29
25	Sinhala Buddhist	Parami	39	Seya	36
26	Sinhala Buddhist	Sithari	53	Sajeewani	31
27	Sinhala Buddhist	Melanthi	30	Ayesha	21
28	Sinhala Buddhist	Sanjana	26	Arundathi	31
29	Sinhala Buddhist	Priyandhi	48	Daham	24
30	Sinhala Buddhist	Bopath	19	Piumi	15
31	Sinhala Buddhist	Sepali	24	Anu	08
32	Tamil Christian	–		Sharon	26

3.1 *The Analysis of Data from the Attitudinal Scale*

The attitudinal scale of cultural perceptions based on Bennett's (1993) Intercultural Sensitivity Development Model that was used to understand whether student teachers' cultural perceptions were more inclined towards ethnocentric or ethnorelative attitudes was analysed by giving an appropriate mark based on its stage and these scores are analysed in Table 4. The real identity of the student participants is concealed by pseudonym i.e., using typical names representing their ethnicities in this Table and on all such occasions.

3.2 Findings of the Attitudinal Scale

When discussing the scores obtained by the second-year participants, it was observed that the highest and the lowest scores i.e., 53 and 6 were obtained by Sinhala Buddhist student teachers. Conversely, the highest score obtained by a Tamil student is 37 while the highest score obtained by a Muslim student was 35 and the lowest was 6. The three Sinhala Roman Catholics had scores of 11, 9 and 6, respectively. The mean score of the total sample was 16.93, which is only the half of the required score. The mean score of the Tamils was 33.5 and the Muslims was 21.4. The Sinhala Roman Catholics had a mean score of 10 whereas Sinhala Buddhists had a mean score of 15.52. Accordingly, the Tamils had the highest mean score, and the Roman Catholic Sinhalese had the lowest mean score. The highest number of student scores lay in the range of 31–40 which is 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 5. Both were obtained by Sinhala Buddhist students. The highest score of Muslims was 44 and the lowest was 08. The highest score of Tamils was 33. The highest score of Roman Catholics was 29 and the lowest was 19. The mean score of the Sinhala Buddhists was 19.18. The mean score of Tamils was 33 and of the Muslims 29.5. The mean score of Sinhala Roman Catholics was 25. The highest number of scores lay in the range of 21–30 which consisted of 31.25% of the population. The mode of the score was 29. The range of scores of the total sample, and the mean score of each ethnic group are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Mean score of the sample

Range	Second years		First years	
	Number of students	Percentage %	Number of students	Percentage %
0–10	02	6.45	06	18.75
11–20	12	38.7	04	12.5
21–30	06	19.35	13	40.63
31–40	05	16.13	07	21.88
41–50	00	00	02	6.25
51–60	00	00	00	00
Over 61	00	00	00	00

Table 6 Mean score based on ethno-religious identity

Ethnicity/Religion	Tamil	Muslim	Sinhala Buddhist	Sinhala Roman Catholic
Mean Score of the Second Years	33	21.4	15.52	10
Mean Score of the First Years	22	29.5.	19.18	25

Table 7 Deviation of scores from the mean

Ethno-religious identity	Deviation
Tamils	1.9
Muslims	3.0
Sinhala Buddhists	-1.0
Sinhala Roman Catholics	-3.3

The highest percentage of student scores (19.35%) of the second years lay in the range of 11–20 and 40.63% of the first-year student scores lay in the range of 21–30, just at the margin of gaining intercultural competence. The lowest percentage, 6.45% of the second years, lay between 0–10 and 6.25% scores of first years were between 41–50. None of the students from any batch scored marks above 60. When the mean scores were analysed based on the ethnicity the result was as shown in Table 6.

From the second-year batch the highest mean score 33 was achieved by Tamils and from the first years the highest mean score 29 was achieved by Muslims. Thus, the tables exemplified the fact that the majority Sinhala Buddhists are more inclined towards ethnocentrism. Table 7 displays how far the mean score of each ethnic group deviated from the expected score.

When focused on how far the mean score of each ethnic/religious group deviated from the original it is clear that Muslims have the highest positive deviation whereas the Roman Catholic Sinhalese have the highest negative deviation. Thus, the findings from the attitudinal scale show that the cultural perceptions of both first- and second-year students are more inclined towards ethnocentrism which means they believe their culture is superior to others at the beginning of the intervention. However, when the same attitudinal scale was implemented at the end of the intervention, the picture changed. This is clearly evident in Table 8 where both the marks students scored at the beginning of the intervention and at the end of the intervention are compared side by side.

When the scores of the first-year students taken before the intervention are compared with the ones taken after the intervention, it can be seen that out of the 32 participants only two have not increased their scores and one student has stayed at the same score. If this is taken as a percentage, 90.63% of the student teachers can be said to have improved their scores after being subjected to intercultural sensitivity training. Those who have scored more than 35 can be considered as in the ethno-relative phase of intercultural competence. Thus, 17 people have scored more than 35 after the intervention which is an average of 53.13%. None of the participants of the second year sample have gone down in their scores after the intervention and they all have improved their scores generally at a 100% success rate. 19 participants have scored more than 35, an average of 59.38. Hence, when considering the numbers of the sample, the intercultural learning seemed to be successful. However, many other strategies described below were used to corroborate the findings.

Table 8 Marks of the attitudinal scale before and after intervention

No	Ethnicity/religion	Second year			First years		
		Student's name	SBI	SAI	Student's name	SBI	SAI
1	Tamil Hindu	Maha	37	38	Abinaya	33	36
2	Muslim	Nihamath Hayam	35	63	Maiza	32	47
3	Muslim	Fazeeha	11	35	Zaina	08	28
4	Muslim	Raza	35	44	Fathima Manal	35	44
5	Muslim	Hazeena	35	41	Zeenath	33	45
6	Muslim	Maf Ali	06	28	Hazeena	34	52
7	Sinhala Catholic	Jacky	25	33	Zinda	24	36
8	Sinhala Catholic	Gabrielle	16	24	Mar x	23	31
9	Sinhala Buddhist	Ashaya	08	40	Shadsavi x	25	40
10	Sinhala Buddhist	Sachi	28	38	Sarah	29	40
11	Sinhala Buddhist	Radeeka	11	37	Shenali	21	52
12	Sinhala Buddhist	Induwari	13	46	Sherin	15	20
13	Sinhala Buddhist	Samanthi	34	44	Manel	18	40
14	Sinhala Buddhist	Upamali	06	25	Vimeka	22	36
15	Sinhala Buddhist	Randhi	26	34	Pahansilu	18	30
16	Sinhala Buddhist	Samadhi	17	34	Udaka	21	29
17	Sinhala Buddhist	Nishu	31	47	Saumya	22	29
18	Sinhala Buddhist	Sadeesha	29	36	Dineni	09	32
19	Sinhala Buddhist	Saranya	16	27	Samanali	15	30
20	Sinhala Buddhist	Tharika	16	19	Chichee	20	36
21	Sinhala Buddhist	Samudini	25	29	Thilini	29	29
22	Sinhala Buddhist	Parami	39	41	Seya	36	51
23	Sinhala Buddhist	Sithari	53	55	Sajeewani	31	45
24	Sinhala Buddhist	Melanthi	30	43	Ayesha	21	22
25	Sinhala Buddhist	Sanjana	26	28	Arundathi	31	39
26	Sinhala Buddhist	Priyandhi	48	59	Daham	24	52
27	Sinhala Buddhist	Bopath	19	35	Nihara	13	15
28	Sinhala Buddhist	Amanda	32	49	Piumi	5	24
29	Sinhala Buddhist	Devi	16	31	Nayana	12	14
30	Sinhala Buddhist	Samuduni	29	48	Sheshadri	38	28
31	Sinhala Buddhist	Sepali	24	25	Anu	08	38
32	Tamil Christian				Sharon	26	28

Note: SBI: Score Before Intervention; SAI: Score After Intervention

4 Analysis of Student Diaries, Observer Field Notes and Researcher's Reflective Journal

As mentioned earlier the data from classroom proceedings were logged on using three strategies, namely student diaries, field notes of the non-participant observer and the researcher's reflective journal. Although student diaries did not feature entries related to observation, they were used to access direct responses of

students to the intercultural syllabus as well as their cultural perceptions. The entries in the student diaries also enabled the researcher to access personal thoughts, feelings and opinions of the participants which she could not have done otherwise. Besides, the key objective of maintaining the reflective journal was to reflect on the researcher's practice and class activities. The data collected from these three sources were interpreted using the content analysis method. While analysing student diaries, emergent categories were identified. For example, student notes revealed different variables, such as the content relevant to student knowledge about other cultures, their skills to interact with people from other cultures, their attitudes towards the culturally different others and their critical awareness about intercultural issues. Thus, the researcher followed an 'emerged coding' method after initial analysis of data. Nevertheless, her coding and categorisation were greatly influenced by the theories of intercultural competence discussed in the literature review. Thus, the student diaries were read several times in order to identify perceptions and group them into categories to work out patterns and decode meaning. It was considered necessary that groups of words which give the sense of similar meaning or undertone were in the same categories and if similar words were used, they too were interpreted as connected to the same ideas and concepts. Tables based on these categories were drawn up, findings were analysed, and conclusions were drawn based on the major themes.

From these data the researcher wanted to find answers for the research questions; particularly the focus was on finding out whether the student teachers responded positively to the activities in the specially designed curriculum and changed their ethnocentric cultural perceptions over the time of the intervention. The researcher was also interested in understanding what types of activities were more/less effective in developing intercultural competence of the student teachers. Therefore, when finding categories of similar ideas, the focus was also on gathering up statements related to the obtained categories. For the purposes of triangulation, the researcher's reflective journal entries and non-participant observer's field notes based on the same activity were analysed simultaneously to work out patterns and connections between and among them.

The reflective journal helped the researcher to reflect on what happened in the class and also acted as an aid to memory. To analyse the entries of the reflective journal the content analysis method was used. After reading the entries several times, themes were developed on which the analysis was based. The focus of these themes was on finding out the cultural perceptions of the prospective teacher participants, and thus the same categorisations related to student diaries were used in analysing both the reflective journal entries and entries in the field notes of the observer. As mentioned earlier, the field notes and reflective journal entries were divided into three segments as follows: (a) what I did, (b) what happened, and (c) what I think about what happened.

In the data analysis, extensive attention was paid to the last two segments since they gave better insight into answering the research questions. When maintaining the student diaries, the students were instructed to invent a name representing their

cultural identity and stick to it to preserve their anonymity; these were the names used throughout.

What was found in the student diaries related to the activities logged in Table 9. When similar ideas/phrases/words were found, the names of all of those students were mentioned against the comment. Since they take lots of space, only an excerpt of the first activity is included here as a sample to give a brief idea.

5 Findings of Student Diaries, Observer Field Notes and Researcher's Reflective Journal

The comments in all three rows of the Student Diaries section of Table 9 show that the students were very reluctant to use a greeting from another culture, which clearly illustrated their ethnocentric attitudes. However, they also gave evidence as to the keenness of students to learn about other cultures which happened as a result of the promotion of intercultural competence in the intercultural curriculum. When comparing the entries in the student diaries, field notes and reflective journal it can be concluded that student teachers had very 'culture centred' opinions and most of them believed their culture was superior to other cultures at the beginning of the intervention. Also, students who belonged to minority groups were much more culture conscious than students coming from the majority group. However, they responded positively to the activities in the intercultural curriculum, and it was obvious they improved their knowledge about each other's cultures, developed skills required to handle intercultural encounters effectively and changed their negative attitudes towards culturally different others during the course of the intervention to a significant extent.

The Observation Field Notes were maintained by the non-participant observer during the activities. Through the checklist the observer tried to quantify intercultural competence by allocating a designation for different IC components. Thus, a rating system was given to each component as follows: Inadequate – 1; minimal – 2; moderate – 3; extensive – 4. For each of the activities discussed above, the checklist was used for observation, and students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills were given a score. In some instances, some of the students were not actively participating in the lesson. In such circumstances it was difficult for the observer to quantify their intercultural competence. Thus, no marks were given. After each lesson the marks of the individuals were totalled up and their progress recorded. The mean scores obtained by these students are included in Fig. 1. A slight increase in marks in the activities towards the end was obvious in most cases. Only a few students did not show an evident change. However, when considering the mean score, it is obvious that progress has taken place. This shows that students' intercultural awareness has improved in all three aspects of knowledge.

Table 9 Analysis of attitudes towards greetings and intercultural information exchange

Student diaries	
Ethnocentric	<p>"It was first time I did a different greeting. It was somewhat uncomfortable for me" Fathima Manal</p> <p>"I am very comfortable when I used my own greeting <i>Ayubowan</i> to greet others" Sachi/Piumi</p> <p>"Using previous one's gestures was a trouble to me" Hazeema</p> <p>"It is a bit odd to say <i>ayubowan</i>" Fathima/Zeenath</p>
Ethnorelative	<p>"It was the very first time I greeted in a different way I was happy to learn it" -Sajeewani</p> <p>"Got familiarised with others' cultural patterns" Seya</p> <p>"We have to respect other cultures. By knowing about other cultures, we can respect them strongly" Maiza</p>
Effectiveness of the activity	<p>"Happy to know the way they greet" Fathima Manal</p> <p>"I learnt how they celebrate, how they feel about their festivals" Udaka</p> <p>"Able to collect much information about other cultures; I enjoyed very much" Abinaya</p> <p>"I understood about other cultures" Zinda</p> <p>"It is useful to know about other cultures" Nihamath/ Hazeena/ Maiza/ Mar/ Priyandhi</p>
Field Notes of the Observer	
Ethnocentric	<p>"Although this was the very first activity done with the class, it was not difficult to identify how reluctant the majority of the students were, to use a greeting from another culture. I noticed that many students quickly finished up the greeting part when they were using a greeting from another culture. Some were very shy to use them. Also, some students were making sour faces when using them. It was evident that they are not used to this type of activity from their behaviour."</p>
Ethnorelative	<p>The general idea accepted by everybody was that it was an interesting experience to share knowledge with friends from other cultures. I noticed students enthusiastically taking part in friendly discussions.</p>
Effectiveness of the activity	<p>Majority of the students enjoyed the activity. They seemed to have learnt a lot of facts about other cultures from the interactions, which was revealed in the post discussion stage.</p>
Reflective Journal of the Researcher	
Ethnocentric	<p>"Students were very reluctant to use the greeting they learnt from the friend, if the friend belonged to another culture. At first, I thought the reluctance was due to shyness at using an unfamiliar gesture. But later my close observations revealed the dislike merely because the greeting belonged to another culture. I noticed they were making faces as if they are touching something 'yuki' when using these gestures. This uneasiness was specifically evident between Sinhalese and Muslims."</p>
Ethnorelative	<p>"I was glad to notice that participants were very keen to ask questions that enhanced their knowledge about each other's cultures and attentively listened to the answers given by their friends."</p>
Effectiveness of the activity	<p>"Most of the participants were very keen to interact with each other and they said activity was interesting. They said they learnt a lot of new things about other cultures."</p>

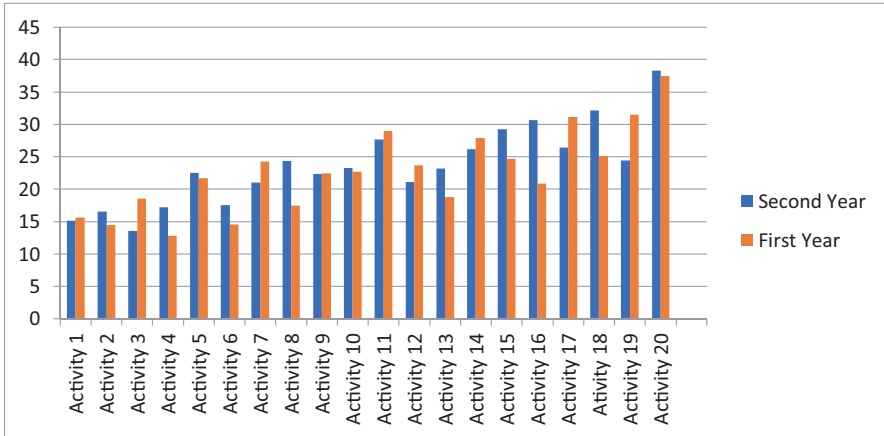


Fig. 1 Mean of the marks of the sample for each activity

In relation to the Researcher’s Reflective Journal, serious issues emerged that may reflect the political discord in Sri Lanka. Students were ethnocentric enough to view with distaste greetings from another culture and were reluctant to take the role of the Other by using such greetings themselves. This is not altogether surprising, especially as people from different cultures might have been opponents in the civil war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese (1983–2009). Language was an issue that contributed to that war. In 1956, a “Sinhala Only Act” was passed which replaced English as the official language. The Tamil-minority population found this unfair because it impeded their recruitment to public service, and was discriminatory in linguistic, cultural and economic terms. The ethno-relative stage of the current research showed some willingness of participants to reach out and learn about each other’s cultures. As such, it can be regarded as a success for the intervention.

6 Conclusion:(Re)defining ‘Intercultural Competence’

The findings helped in concluding that at the beginning of the intervention the participants were more inclined towards ethnocentrism. All data collection tools indicated that the major reason for this is the negative picture they had of their cultural counterparts because of lack of knowledge about other cultures. With every activity in the intervention the participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their preconceived ideas and critically analyse them during the pre-discussion stage. Then, they were in a position to unlearn their biased preconceptions about other cultures. With the passing of time, they learnt to listen and respect cultural difference, critically analyse intercultural issues, and show empathy towards cultural others. This ethnorelative stage of intercultural sensitivity development can be

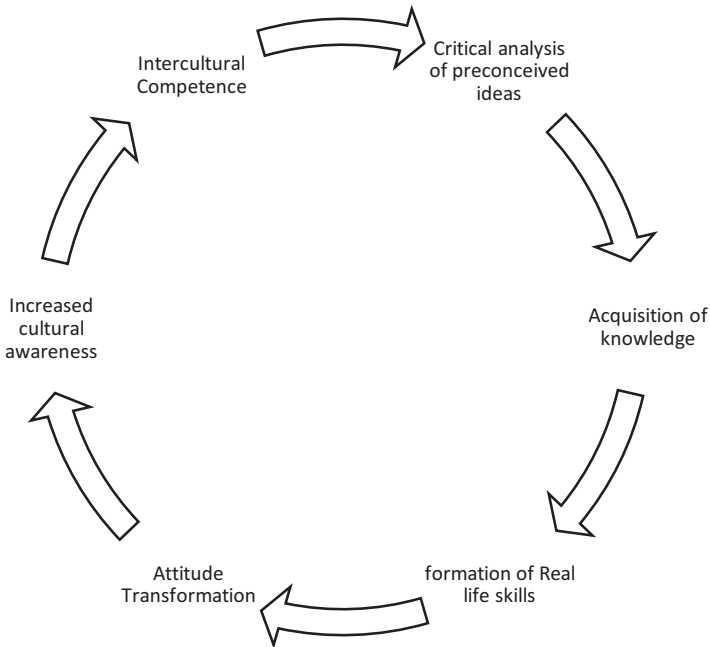


Fig. 2 Intercultural competence as a cyclic process

illustrated by using the following cycle (see Fig. 2). Thus, the development of intercultural competence is a lifelong process in which you acquire knowledge, form skills, transform attitudes and increase cultural awareness.

The present study explored how Sri Lankan student teachers perceive “intercultural competence” (IC) by inviting them to give their own definitions before and after the training intervention. The student teachers’ understanding of IC improved along the road. The analysis showed that there are three common phrases found in the majority of the students’ definitions of the concept of IC, in relation to (a) knowledge about other cultures, (b) the ability to communicate across cultural differences, and (c) tolerance of cultural difference. Based on the findings of the current study, a context-based definition of intercultural competence would read as follows: “Intercultural competence means the acquisition of knowledge, formation of real-life skills and the transformation of attitudes necessary to communicate across cultural boundaries with minimum conflict” (Tennekoon, 2021, p. 148).

Thus, this study has contributed in identifying a context-based definition for intercultural competence from a non-Eurocentric perspective. It also sheds a significant light on the English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka by illuminating the importance of Intercultural Competence in making English a true lingua franca among different cultures in Sri Lankan multiethnic society.

It is obvious that English Language Learning in Sri Lanka has neglected the intercultural dimensions of English language learning, making learners inadequately prepared for challenges in their real-life language use which is more of a communication tool than a linguistic tool. Thus, it is high time we include intercultural aspects within language learning programs in Sri Lanka. In addition, English language teacher training programs in the country have not paid much attention to the challenges encountered by English language teachers as they are constantly required to cope with culturally and linguistically diverse students in their language classrooms. Therefore, English language teacher educators should be prepared to address intercultural competence both theoretically and practically in their teacher training courses through curriculum, syllabi and pedagogic revisions. Moreover, the notion of reaching native speaker competence must be replaced with the model of intercultural speaker, which fosters the ability to relate to other cultures in a way that helps in realising the goals of English as a link language. Intercultural learning should be made an integral part of foreign language education, and not some peripheral component. This is necessary to reach intercultural communicative competence in addition to linguistic or lexical competence.

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