Cross Cultural Aspects of Classroom Management in Sri Lanka
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Abstract: The pluralistic construct of the Sri Lankan Teaching English as a Second Language environment recognizes cultural sensitivity as a paramount requisite as cultural diversity can exist within the student populations and between students and the teacher. Cultural perceptions of students and teachers when based on the principle of equity negate tunnel vision and biases. Incorporating material and activities that foster cultural awareness is identified as a classroom strategy which when used astutely can reap optimal benefits and result in cross cultural bridging. Thus the intricate weave of the cultural fabric of the country has made the management of the Teaching English as a Second Language classroom in Sri Lanka complex.
Keywords: pluralistic culture, Teaching English as a Second Language, cultural bridging, classroom management

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic and a multireligious country where ethnicity and religion are the main elements which define cultural diversity. Cultural diversity in Sri Lanka recognizes three main ethnicities: Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim; four main religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam; three main first languages: Sinhala, Tamil and an institutionalized second language Sri Lankan English(SLE). The multiethnic nature of the Sri Lankan society is reflected through the following statistics.

Table 1: Estimated % population of Sri Lanka by ethnic group (2011)

Ethnic group	% population
Sinhalese	74.9
Sri Lanka Tamil	11.2
Indian Tamil	4.2
Sri Lanka Moor	9.2
Burgher	0.2
Malay	0.2
Other	0.1

Source: [15].

This ethnic diversity is recognized at the primary and secondary educational institutions which are mainly under the Ministry of Education and as seen in statistics below many of them provide the students the right to decide on their medium of education. While the Sinhala and Tamil media are the choice of a majority of Sinhala and Tamil students respectively the Muslim student population opts to follow their studies

in one of these media. Students are chosen for English medium education through a test conducted at school level while in some urban schools following core subjects in the English medium is compulsory. The following table illustrates that most schools provide education in the Sinhala and Tamil media.

Table 2: Government School System at a Glance 2012

Schools on medium of education		
Sinhala only	6,368	64.3%
Tamil only	2,914	29.4%
Sinhala and Tamil	39	0.4%
Sinhala and English	403	4.1%
Tamil and English	152	1.5%
Sinhala, Tamil and English	29	0.3%
Total	9,905	100%

Source:[16].

Furthermore though Sri Lanka has an overall literacy rate of 95.6% and exhibits gender equality in literacy it is a very low percentage of this population who claim literacy in SLE. As a result of the Official Language Act No 33 of 1956 and Act 28 of 1958 the vernaculars- Sinhala or Tamil became the medium of instruction within the government educational institutions and English was taught as a second language. Though TESL has a history of around 150 years and was based on egalitarian values it was very low population who self-assess and claim that they have literacy in English. But what is noted in the statistics provided by the two national surveys below is a