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Use of Official Languages among Public Officers: A Case Study of Dehiwala Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka

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This research is concerned with the use of official languages among public officers with special reference to the Dehiwala Divisional Secretariat (DS) in Sri Lanka. Roughly Sri Lanka is concerned as a multilingual, multiethnic country where there was a war between Sinhalese and Tamils nearly for three decades to divide its territory. One of the root causes for this war was the language issue. Thus, since independence, successive governments have been implementing many language policies in order to ensure the language rights of its citizens. However, still the public sector is being criticised at large for having limitations in delivering their services to the public in the language that they prefer. Although there are laws stipulated and facilities given, it seems that government expectations are not yet achieved. The dearth of bilingual officers in public institutions is the major obstacle to overwhelm this issue continually. Thirty five public officers who have passed the second language proficiency examination serving four selected public institutions in Dehiwala DS were interviewed in order to examine the factors that create hindrances in using official languages among public officers. Further, the use of second language among public officers is expected to be analysed using one of the second language acquisition theories: Krashen's five hypotheses on second language acquisition. In order to understand better the factors that create hindrances to use official languages it has been analysed under two sub topics such as strengths and weaknesses in the institutional arrangements/systems of teaching other official languages to the public officers and limitations in the present institutional incentives to learn the other official language.

Key words: acquisition, bilingualism, official languages, public officers, second language