

## **The Development of the Writing Skill in English as a Second Language (A Study Based on the Rural Formees of Priests and Nuns of the Roman Catholic Church in Sri Lanka)**

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Language is for communication. It is in the spoken and written form. Today, the main streams of education in Sri Lanka are Sinhala and Tamil with English as the 2<sup>nd</sup> language. In reality, many adolescents and adults struggle to acquire the English language. This was not so at a time when the medium of primary education was English. The acquisition of the second language is a great toil to the youth who aspire to commit themselves to service in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka as Priests and Nuns. They need the English language skills in order to transmit their knowledge and communicate the message in the right context. During the Portuguese period, a number of missionary Congregations of European origin began to settle in the island. They recruited natives for the continuity of service of the Church. As a policy, the religious and seminary formation was conducted in the language of the missionaries. With the arrival of the British, the medium of instruction became English. Today, the majority of priestly and religious vocations in the Church come mainly from the rural areas where schools are run in Sinhala and Tamil. Hence, this research is meant to explore the difficulties of priestly and religious formees of rural origin, in acquiring English, with a view to developing the right understanding of verbs, tenses and modals, similarly, to design an apt syllabus and methodology for more effective results. This study was conducted on a sample of fifty formees – twenty-five young women and twenty-five young men between the ages of twenty and thirty. They came from eleven administrative districts with different backgrounds. Forty four have been educated in the Sinhala medium while six in the Tamil. Qualitative data was collected through a questionnaire. Pre-Tests and Post-Tests on verb forms, tenses and modals were conducted for analysis. The Pre-Test revealed that the level of the English writing skills of most of these candidates is below average, especially in the perfect forms. Thus, their formation programme invariably has to be complemented with additional lessons. Lack of exposure to English has resulted in rural formees not obtaining the required proficiency. They can express their thoughts verbally to some extent yet, they do not speak complete grammatical sentences with precise words and accurate verbs. Therefore, they are not as successful in writing. Today, many houses of religious formation of the Catholic Church do not have a well proven methodology to instill the English writing skill in their formees. Hence, at the end of this research religious formation houses hope to have a methodology and syllabus to help their formees use verbs in the right context.

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