

# Contribution to the Development of Political Concepts of Civic Education Among in Grades 10-11 in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

*The man began to live a civilized life in the study of human history; he realized the need and importance of living in a way that would not be a trouble to other living things. They were accustomed to shaping their lives because they had some understanding of the rights of others as well as their duties. The main reason for conflict to arise in any society is that human beings do not live lawfully. Humans always live by emphasizing only his rights and do not care about the duties they have to fulfill. Therefore, it is clear that there are some conflicts between individuals as well as between societies. From the school days, citizens need to understand that r to live together in a community; they must live lawfully and democratically. Accordingly, the school curriculum in Sri Lanka has taken steps to provide an understanding of political concepts for the students in schools. Special attention is paid to the Civic Education Curriculum for Grades 10 and 11. It is planned to impart the required political conceptual knowledge under ten main topics. Understanding political concepts is a skill that every citizen of society should have. Thus, updating the understanding of changing political concepts can be cited as a responsibility of education. In view of all the above, it is clear that it is important for school education to give students an understanding of political concepts. It was also noted that there are problems with the current political understanding of Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be pointed out that it is timely and essential to find out whether the students of Grades 10 and 11 in Sri Lanka have an adequate understanding of political concepts through the subject of Civic Education. The main purpose of this research is to understand the existing knowledge gap about political concepts in the system and to produce new knowledge needed to fill it. There were two specific objectives. First one is Identify key political concepts in Civic Education and second one discovers students' level of understanding on political concepts through Civic Education. This is a quantitative research that adopts questionnaires as a research instrument. 18 teachers who teach Civic Education in grades 10, 11 were selected under the purposive Sample technique. Also, 110 students studying in Grade 11 were selected for the student sample subject to random sampling. Data collection and an autonomous questionnaire and interview schedule for students were used. Necessary data was obtained from the teachers through interviews. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed in percentage terms and the data obtained from the interviews were presented in narration format under the qualitative results. Data analysis shows that civic education does not provide an adequate level of understanding of political concepts, as well as students have similar problems. Although it is often necessary to appoint teachers with expertise in the subject to teach Civic Education, it is not the case in many schools, and teachers point out that there are problems with the selection of students as this subject is included in the curriculum. These were the conclusion of the study. The basic political concepts that a citizen should know are included in the syllabus of Civic Education. Arrangements have been made to teach relevant political concepts to the students in the school. It is advisable to make Civic Education a core subject so that every student can study it. In order to teach Civic Education, it is necessary to provide special training to the teachers in that subject. Civic Education can be used as a primary source to help citizens in society protect their rights and to fulfill their duties and responsibilities on behalf of others.*

**Keywords:** Civic Education, Political Concepts, Lawful, Development, Students

### Background to the Problem

A man began to live a civilized life in the study of human history; he realized the need and importance of living in a way that would not be a trouble to other living things. They were accustomed to shaping their lives because they had some understanding of the rights of others as well as their own duties. Alahakoon (1994) comments above confirm that men in the past had some degree of political understanding. The main reason for arisen conflict in any society is that human beings do not live lawfully. He always lives by only demanding his rights and does not care about the duties he has to fulfill. Due to this issue, conflicts between individuals and between societies might have happened. From the school days, citizens need to understand that in order to live together in a society, they must live lawfully and democratically. Grade 11 Teachers' Guide for Civic Education (2016) also point out that to build a democratic society, people need to be introduced to the need for

legitimacy. Therefore, it is essential to give people an understanding of political concepts. Alahakoon (1994) points out that educating school children about political concepts contributes significantly to shaping their future political behavior from an early age. Gamage (1994) has also pointed out that.

Accordingly, the school curriculum in Sri Lanka has taken steps to provide an understanding of political concepts to the students during their school days. Those subject called 'Civic Education' has been included in the syllabus as a compulsory subject from grade six to grade nine and as a basket subject for grades 10 and 11. Special attention is paid to the Civic Education Curriculum for Grades 10 and 11. The Civic Education Curriculum planned to impart the required political conceptual knowledge under ten main topics. Table 1 shows some of the critical aspects of the political concepts designed according to the syllabus of Grades 10 and 11.

**Table 1 Major Political Concepts Taught in Grades 10 and 11**

| Grade 10   | Grade 11   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democracy</li> <li>• The nature of the state and government</li> <li>• The role of the state</li> <li>• Forms of constitutions</li> <li>• Party system</li> <li>• Decentralization of power</li> <li>• Devolution of power</li> <li>• Unitary State and Federal State</li> <li>• Provincial Council system</li> <li>• Local Government Institutions</li> <li>• Multicultural society</li> <li>• good governance</li> <li>• Economic methods</li> <li>• Basic economic issues</li> <li>• Different interpretations</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law and justice</li> <li>• The Judicial system of Sri Lanka</li> <li>• Different layers of government</li> <li>• Executive</li> <li>• Legislature</li> <li>• Judiciary</li> <li>• Functions of Local Government Institutions</li> <li>• Human Rights and Duties</li> <li>• Women's rights</li> <li>• Child rights</li> <li>• Labour rights</li> <li>• Environmental issues</li> <li>• Development and Sustainable Development</li> <li>• International relations</li> <li>• International trade</li> <li>• International organizations</li> </ul> |

The Civic Education Curriculum seeks to provide insight into a number of such political concepts and related sub-concepts. Commenting on the importance of imparting an understanding of political concepts, Ritzen (2001) points out that equality in societies can be achieved through readiness and commitment to create equal opportunities for all members of society. It can be seen that the subject of Civic Education is a potential subject that can be used to construct

the political concepts ' understanding in students as compared to other subjects. This is evident by looking at the objectives of the subject in 2016; nine main objectives were introduced for Civic Education. They are,

- To Develop the skills needed to live in unity in a diverse society
- To produce suitable citizens for the upholding of human qualities and social values

- To Develop appropriate skills to contribute to society as a disciplined and law-abiding citizen
- To Collaborate with each other in personal and social activities
- To provide an understanding of the governance patterns in Sri Lanka and in the world
- To Build a society that adheres to democratic principles and the Charter of Human Rights
- To Develop the strength needed to cope with the unexpected and confusing situations of a constantly changing world
- To Build a society that values mutual responsibilities and duties
- To Direct the use of social corporations and organizations for the betterment of the society (Grade 11 Civic Education Teacher Guide, 2016)

Through the highlighted objectives in the Citizenship Education above, one can identify how the subject of Civic Education is structured to help students understand the basic political concepts required to live as a social citizen at school age. Furthermore objectives introduced by the National Commission for Education (2003) also show the need to understand political concepts at the school level.

Understanding political concepts is a skill that every citizen of society should have. Political concepts change over time, and Sorensen (2008) noted that, the political process also changes and moves forward with those changes. Thus, updating the understanding of changing political concepts can be said as a responsibility of education. Hettige (2004) points out that with the current pattern of education, there is a problem with providing Civic Education to school children in Sri Lanka. It has been pointed out that the problem is that the development the required skills is not taking place due to the need to acquire the knowledge required to pass the examinations instead of applying education to life. It is clear from the above objectives that Civic Education aims to produce future citizens who will lead a peaceful life with virtues and co-operate with other members. However with the current exam-centric education pattern, it is questionable that whether the objective can be achieved. The public needs to have an understanding of politics and political concepts in order to work with the government. Owen (2008) points out that these concepts are often debated in the

political world, and therefore teaching and learning political concepts is not an easy task.

Regardless of the challenges, school should provide an understanding of political concepts for the betterment of mankind. A study by Papaoikonomou (2017) found that boys are more interested in learning about politics than girls; Furthermore political knowledge gained in school will be useful in their future socialization processes. In a study by Levy (2015), most of the respondents said that they first gained political insight from the school curriculum. Study r was done by Vonea (2014). That social integration is not a difficult task if individuals in a society are politically integrated.

In view of all the above, it is clear that school to give students an understanding of political concepts. It was also noted that there are problems with the current political understanding of Sri Lankan students. Therefore, This situation suggests that it is timely and essential to find out whether the students of Grades 10 and 11 in Sri Lanka have an adequate understanding of political concepts through the subject of Civic Education. This study aims to arm future citizens with political insights, besides from providing insights to the policy makers from the findings of the study.

### **Research Methodology**

The main purpose of research is to understand gap in the existing knowledge in the topic researched and to produce new knowledge needed to fill it. The main objective of this study, which explores the contribution of Civic Education to the understanding of political concepts, is to uncover students' cognitions of whether students in grades 10 and 11 have an adequate understanding of political concepts. The following two specific objectives were also used to achieve the main objective.

- Identify key political concepts contained in Civic Education
- Discovering the level of understanding gained on political concepts through the subject of Civic Education

This study utilised survey as an instrument to gather information from the participants. This is quantitative study which aims to identify individual perceptions of students, Senadheera and Wanasinghe

(2014) have also stated that the survey design is helpful method in uncovering personal opinions. As a sample, 18 teachers who teach the subject of Civic Education in grades 10, 11 were selected under the purposive Sample technique. Also, 110 students studying in Grade 11 were selected for the student sample subject to random sampling method. The teacher participants were chosen by using purposive sampling method. An autonomous questionnaire and interview schedule for students were employed. Interviews were used to obtain information from the teachers participants. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed in percentage terms and the data obtained from the interviews were presented in narration format under the qualitative methodology.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

The first objective was to help students understand the basic concepts included in Civic Education, further ease their understanding the political concepts of Sri Lanka help them understand political concepts. The basic concepts identified were presented in Table 1. Out of these concepts, the following 15 concepts were selected to reveal the level of student comprehension through the questionnaire.

Those concepts are;

- Understanding the law and its nature
- Types of laws and the role of the state them their

- perceptions
- The Judicial system and it's of the judiciary in Sri Lanka
- The rule of law
- The importance of impartial justice
- Different layers of the government
- Roles and responsibilities at various levels of government officers
- Government's responsibility to the citizen
- Characteristics of a democratic system of government
- Different forms of the political party system and their characteristics
- Responsibility of political parties
- State and its responsibility
- Different forms of government
- Decentralization and devolution of power
- Roles of Local Government Institutions

In order to test the level of understanding of these concepts, responses were obtained through a questionnaire prepared to the five-Liebert scale was used to measure the students' understanding of the political concepts which range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses given by the students were calculated as a percentage and the level of understanding related to the second objective was determined. Table 2 shows the responses obtained from the participating students.

**Table 2 Student Responses to Understanding Political Concepts**

| Political Concepts  | Strongly Agree |    | Agree |    | Moderately agree |    | Disagree |    | Strongly Disagree |    | Total |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|------------------|----|----------|----|-------------------|----|-------|
|   | N              | %  | N     | %  | N                | %  | N        | %  | N                 | %  |       |
| Understanding the law and its nature                        | 24             | 22 | 42    | 38 | 12               | 11 | 20       | 18 | 12                | 11 | 110   |
| Types of laws and the role of the state in relation to them | 15             | 14 | 36    | 33 | 26               | 24 | 18       | 16 | 15                | 14 | 110   |
| Judicial system and functions of the judiciary in Sri Lanka | 30             | 27 | 44    | 40 | 17               | 15 | 18       | 16 | 01                | 01 | 110   |
| The rule of law   | 10             | 09 | 29    | 26 | 13               | 12 | 38       | 35 | 20                | 18 | 110   |
| The importance of impartial justice                         | 19             | 17 | 51    | 46 | 10               | 09 | 16       | 15 | 14                | 13 | 110   |
| Different layers of government                              | 12             | 11 | 20    | 18 | 12               | 11 | 42       | 38 | 24                | 22 | 110   |
| Roles and responsibilities at various levels of government  | 08             | 07 | 20    | 18 | 15               | 14 | 39       | 35 | 28                | 25 | 110   |
| Government's responsibility to the citizen                  | 15             | 14 | 31    | 28 | 14               | 13 | 28       | 25 | 22                | 20 | 110   |
| Characteristics of a democratic system of government        | 22             | 20 | 39    | 35 | 08               | 07 | 32       | 29 | 09                | 08 | 110   |

|  |            |    |     |            |     |    |            |    |     |    |      |
|--|------------|----|-----|------------|-----|----|------------|----|-----|----|------|
| Different forms of political party system and their features | 26         | 24 | 32  | 29         | 10  | 09 | 24         | 22 | 18  | 16 | 110  |
| Responsibility of political parties                          | 26         | 24 | 34  | 31         | 14  | 13 | 26         | 24 | 10  | 09 | 110  |
| State and its responsibility                                 | 13         | 12 | 33  | 30         | 11  | 10 | 34         | 31 | 19  | 17 | 110  |
| Different forms of government                                | 19         | 17 | 37  | 34         | 12  | 11 | 22         | 20 | 20  | 18 | 110  |
| Devolution and devolution of power                           | 14         | 13 | 39  | 35         | 13  | 19 | 34         | 31 | 10  | 09 | 110  |
| Roles of Local Government Institutions                       | 18         | 16 | 40  | 36         | 16  | 15 | 23         | 21 | 13  | 12 | 110  |
| Total  | 271        |    | 527 |            | 203 |    | 414        |    | 235 |    | 1650 |
|  | 798(48.4%) |    |     | 203(12.3%) |     |    | 649(39.3%) |    |     |    |      |
| Median   | 4.8        |    |     | 1.2        |     |    | 3.8        |    |     |    |      |

Table 2 shows the responses to the questionnaire to determine the level of political understanding of the students. The overall analysis was divided into three categories: Agree, Moderate, and Disagree. According to that analysis, 48.4% of the samples believed that they have an understanding of political concepts at school. Only 39.3% have denied such an understanding. It was also observed that the differences between the two figures was very small. This shows that the subject of civic education does not provide an adequate level of understanding of political concepts. This is confirmed by the fact that the agreed percentage is less than 50%. On average, the agreed-upon ratio is 0.48. It goes on to say that the understanding of political concepts in school is not satisfactory. A moderate response rate of 12.3% also ensures that sufficient knowledge is not available.

A separate analysis of the given political concepts states that there is a 50% greater response to the concept of law and its nature. Such responses were based on an understanding of the law and its nature, the judicial system and functions of the judiciary in Sri Lanka (67%), and the importance of impartial justice (63%). Accordingly, it is clear that steps have been taken to provide a better understanding of the concepts related to law at school. This is well confirmed by the statements made by the students regarding their understanding of the law.

*“When learning about the judicial system in Sri Lanka, I willingly participated. It is important for all of us to know how the judiciary functions in Sri Lanka. That’s why everyone loves this lesson.” (Grade 11 student)*

The reason for this may be that questions related to law are asked in the GCE (O / L) examination every year. This is mentioned in the interview with the teachers.

*“Almost every year a question is asked about the law and the judiciary. So scoring is easy too. Because there are specific subject matters. Children also enjoy participating in these lessons.” (Statement by a Grade 11 teacher)*

Responses were also received on concepts related to democracy. There was a 59% increase in the number of responses that the subject of Citizenship Education is being understood at school. The concepts that received more than 50% response are as follows. Characteristics of a democratic system of government (55%), Different forms of the political party system and their characteristics (53%), Political parties’ responsibility (55%). Thus, it is clear that students gain an understanding of democracy from school. Students will learn these concepts in Grade 10 and a lot of time is allocated for this topic.

Since this is also the first lesson to be learned and taught in Grade 10, it is hoped that more commitment among teachers and students will lead to increase understanding of children these concepts. This was also confirmed by interviews with teachers.

*“There are 30 periods allocated for the lesson of democracy. Therefore, this lesson can be well explained to the children.” (A teacher who teaches grade 10)*

The knowledge about democracy is useful not only for exams but also for everyday life so it is important to be given more emphasis on it. Different strata of government (29%), identified different levels of government roles and responsibilities (25%), in response to areas of low level of understanding at school. This suggests that teachers pay less attention to these parts because of the complex nature of those concepts. The students commented on these concepts as follows.



*“It doesn’t matter about the layers of the government. Subject matters pertaining to layers of government change day by day. That’s a real nuisance.” (Grade 10 student)*

It is clear from the students’ view that it is difficult to study the policy changes that occur from time to time in relation to the government. It may also be difficult to understand subordinate executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the provincial councils and the local authorities. The response is an idea put forward by another student.

*“The layers of the government are taught one day at a time. At one point the executive called the “legislature” the judiciary. Another lesson is about provincial councils. Another lesson is about local government institutions. It is very hard to remember.” (Grade 11 student)*

However, as citizens it is important to be aware of all these layers of government. During the student interview, Researcher was asked from the students if understanding political concepts is important to you as a future citizen. There all the students agreed to it. They felt that an understanding of these political concepts was important in the functioning of society as adults. The reasons given were ‘the importance of gaining political understanding, to act in accordance with the law in society, to spend time as a good citizen, to understand the duties and responsibilities that one has to fulfill as a citizen, and to act with an understanding of the current political situation.

Students and teachers were also asked in the interview about the problems they face in teaching and learning political concepts in the classroom. The issues raised were as follows.

- Lack of understanding of the current political situation
- Lack of interest in current politics
- Lack of adequate knowledge of political concepts in the lower classes
- Teachers who teach civic education do not have much knowledge
- Difficulty in obtaining Sinhala medium books related to political science
- Lack of time to read extra books
- Insufficient time to teach civic education at school
- Limited opportunities to solve problems

regarding the Civic Education in a practical way

- Being too busy at school with other works

Clearly, teachers as well as students have similar problems. Although it is often necessary to appoint teachers with expertise in the subject to teach Civic Education, it is not the case in many schools, and teachers point out that there are problems with the selection of students as this subject is included in the curriculum as a subject.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

This study examined the contribution of Civic Education to the students of grades ten and eleven’s of understanding of political concepts in Sri Lanka. The conclusions drawn from the data analysis are as follows.

- The basic political concepts that a citizen should know are included in the syllabus of Civic Education.
- Arrangements have been made to teach relevant political concepts to the students in the school.
- By imparting an understanding of political concepts from the school stage onwards, one can acquire the skills required to live as a law-abiding citizen of the future.
- Concepts related to law and democracy can be easily understood from the political concepts contained in the syllabus.
- The concepts of “different levels of government” devolution and decentralization are difficult for school children to understand.
- It was also concluded that the number of periods allotted to Civic Education was not sufficient to provide an understanding of political concepts.

Based on the findings of the above conclusions and data analysis, the following suggestions can be made to improve the way political understanding can be taught to students through civic education.

- It is important for every citizen to have an understanding of political concepts through the subject of Civic Education. Nevertheless, for the 10th and 11th grades under the existing syllabus, this subject is an elective subject. It is advisable to make the subject of Civic Education a core subject so that every student can study it.
- In order to teach Civic Education, it is necessary to provide special training to the teachers in that subject. Only qualified teachers should be

involved in teaching the subject.

- An additional reading book on the subject of Civic Education needs to be published.
- Political concepts need to be presented in a very simple way. Here, opportunities should be provided for the students to learn the subject through practical experience.
- Additional subject matter self-study modules can be provided to students through suitable tools such as CDs.
- Civic Education can be used for political experts to provide an understanding of political concepts.
- Instead of traditional learning and teaching methods, it is necessary to adopt different methods such as exploration, seminars, workshops, debates, and competitions.

Thus, it can be pointed out that it is very important to give school children in Sri Lanka a full understanding of political concepts. It can also lead future citizens to act lawfully and to live in harmony with other members of society. Civic Education can be used as a primary source to help citizens in society protect their rights and to fulfill their duties and responsibilities on behalf of others.

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