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Challenges of Learning Tamil as an Official Language: A Study on Public Sector Officials

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There are large numbers of laws, government circulars and implementing agencies in which the language policy should be implemented to improve bilingual skills of the public sector officials. When it comes to the Sinhala officials, there is a huge criticism on the impracticability of use of Tamil in providing the public sector services. The officials themselves blame on the process and the methodologies of teaching and learning of the Tamil. Though it has passed more than 50 decades for the enactment of the Language policy in Sri Lanka, the effective use of Tamil language in the provision of the public sector services by the Sinhala officials cannot be seen. They are quite hesitated to serve in the Tamil populated areas as well. The daily administrative life is vulnerable in those areas due to inadequate bi-lingual and multi-lingual skills of the Sinhala officers. In addition, a monolingual culture is yet prominent at the Divisional level since the majority of Sinhalese' learning abilities are significantly low. In reviewing the literature, it revealed the literature gap to conduct a study related to this issue and to find out the challenging factors. The prime objective of this study was to find out the challenges that are faced by the Sinhala officials in learning and using the Tamil as their second language by giving special reference to *Delthota* Divisional Secretariat which belongs to *Kandy* district. This office has selected as the case study since it provides its services by representing all ethnic and cultural diversities and therefore the officials have to communicate the people using both Sinhala and Tamil languages. The study has used mixed method approach and use of questionnaire survey, Case study, and the Content analysis method were significant as the data collecting means. For the questionnaire survey, total sample size was 40 and the purposive sampling technique was followed. Secondary data collected from the sources such as published books, government websites; policies; Acts and Circulars. The descriptive analysis method was used in the data analysis. The finding revealed that learning Tamil as a second language by the Sinhala officials has not significantly affected in improving their performances and was only useful to fulfil the basic requirement for the salary increments. Challenges occur due to difficulties in adapting with the traditional teaching methodologies, study materials and inadequacy of well-trained Tamil teachers.

Key words: challenges, public sector officials, learning Tamil as an official language