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## Importance of Multilingualism in Academic Performance among the English as Second Language Learners.

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### **Abstract**

This paper talks about the multilingualism and the employment and the importance of multilingualism for the academic performance of the English as second language learners. In general multilingualism can be a thing that cannot avoid in a multi-cultural society, but it gives immense advantages indirectly for the skills development of the language learners. And also, this provides a clear picture about multilingualism and how it can be used to enhance the language skills and the performance of the learners. This study talks about the influence of multilingualism and how it helps more to score during the academic performance in the English as second language classroom.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism, Second Language Learning, Academic Performance.

### **Introduction:**

Language is the basic form of communication. As human beings, people always use their languages for communication with others either using their native languages or languages that are familiar to them. The people who are having the ability of using one language are called monolinguals. In the same way the people who have the skills of using two languages are called bilinguals. Finally, for the individuals who use more than two languages are called multilinguals. In this case it is going to talk about the importance of multilingualism in academic performance among the second language learners.

Multilingualism has been defined by different scholars in various ways. According to Peter Auer and Li Wei (2007) they state that "We estimate that most of the human language users in the world speak more than one language, they are at least bilingual. In quantitative terms, then, monolingualism may be the exception and multilingualism the norm..." As the definition suggests, now the people in the society have gone for multilingualism and no more monolinguals may be found in future. Since the world is becoming complex, with the upcoming updates the people are ready to catch the modifications and they use not only the native languages and try to learn at least a second language for the future usage in the society. So, in future as the above definition says, the monolinguals may not be found in the society. In the same way, it indirectly tells that multilingualism has become a vital fact and the people need to follow it based on the needs that are having.

Now a days, second language learning has become a compulsory fact in the society since the learning outcomes has changed and people need to have skills in different ways to communicate. In the same way, in Sri Lanka Tamil and Sinhala languages are used by main two communities as their native languages and they go for English language as their second language. In this case the demand for the English as the second language has risen since many of the job and educational opportunities are available in English medium. Depending on this reasons people try to master in English language as their second language that they use for communication and learning. However, those who are masters in both Sinhala and Tamil will get more advantages when they learn English and perform in the English as their second language classroom. So, in this study it is going to focus about the effects of being multilinguals in the academic performance of the second language learners.

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In the modern society, for the people who are involving in the process of learning, multilingualism is very useful, because it helps them to make their performances well. In case of the students who are doing their studies in English as their second language, they may have the opportunity to take more advantages of being multilinguals for their academic performance. When the students are having presentations in the English as the second language classroom, they can use their knowledge in other languages to search for information and get them use for their presentations. So, in general term it shows that being multilingual can be benefited in different ways for the students who are doing their learning English as the second language.

**Objectives**

The followings are the objectives of the study.

1. To identify the benefits of multilingualism in academic performance.
2. To identify the issues, arise during classroom activities related to multilingualism.

**Research questions**

How multilingualism can be beneficial during classroom performance in second language classroom?

**Methodology**

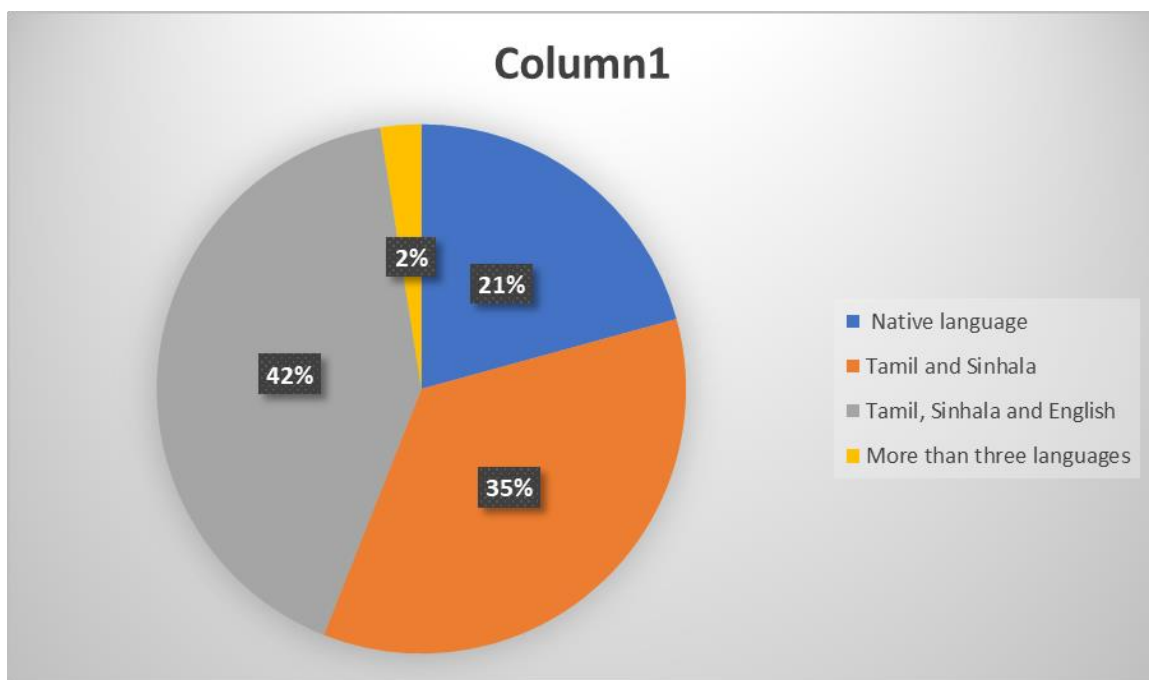
Classroom observation and distributing questionnaire has been selected as the method for this study. Here this method got selected by the researcher since the clarity of the study can establish through this method. And also, the researcher herself can participate to collect and analyze the collected data.

**Result and analysis**

In this section it is going to analyze the collected data to see the effects of multilingualism for academic performance of the English as the second language learners and this will give a clear picture about the focus area of the study.

**Language Background of the participants**

The questionnaire was distributed among the 50 participants to collect basic information about the language background of the students, language habits of the students and the skills they need to be fulfilled. According to that the questionnaire was consisted with 20 questions and number five of the questionnaire was “I am capable of using ..... (1. Only the native language, 2. Both Tamil and Sinhala, 3. Tamil, Sinhala and English languages, 4. More than three languages)”. The answers got from the participants have been analyzed as following.

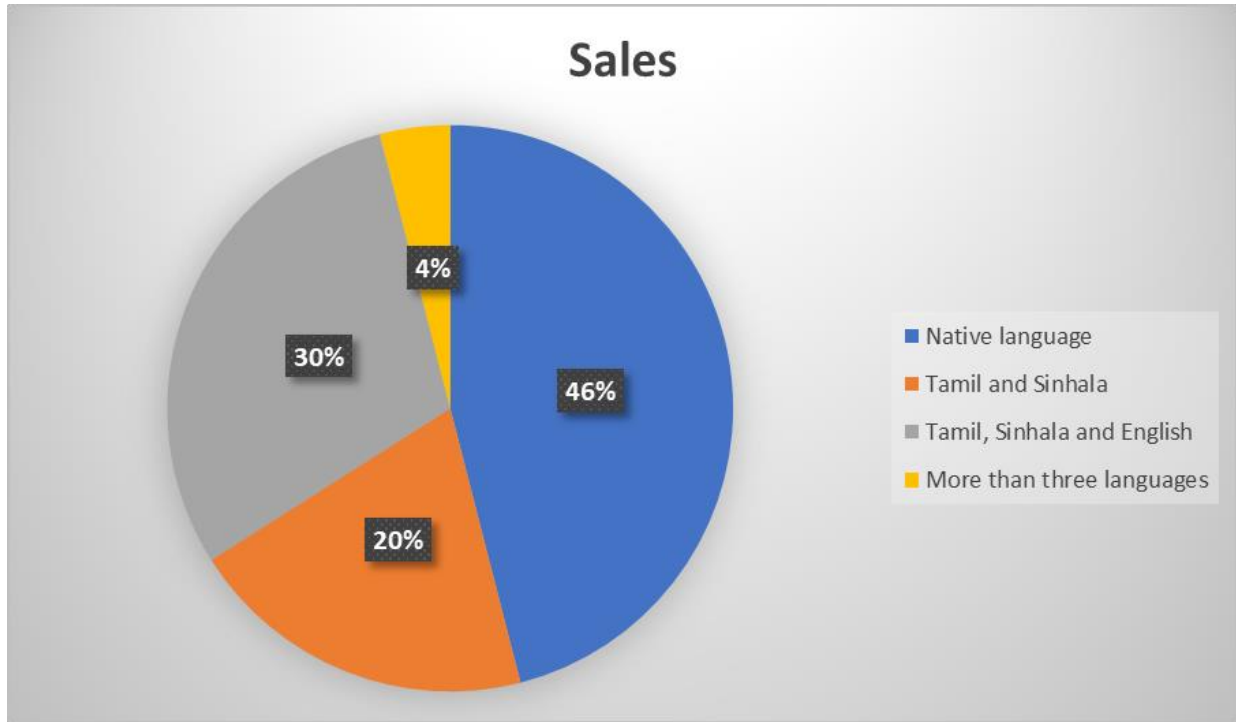


**Fig. 1:** Language abilities of the participants

The above chart 01, talks about the language abilities of the participants to the survey. According to that it is possible to see 21% of the participants are only to have the ability to converse in their native language and 35% can use both Sinhala and Tamil languages. However, the chart shows that 42% can use all the three languages that are maximumly used in Sri Lankan society and finally it says that 2% of the participants are there in the second language classroom who can use more than three languages. According to the analyzed result it shows that maximum number of the participants are multilinguals as it compares with the definition which has taken to the survey.

**Language capabilities of the participants**

It is very important to know the language skills of the participants to see the effects of multilingualism in the classroom activities of the second language learners and number seven of the questionnaire of the way to measure the language skills of the participants. So, the question ““I am good in writing and speaking ..... (1. Only the native language, 2. Both Tamil and Sinhala, 3. Tamil, Sinhala and English languages, 4. More than three languages)”. The following analyzed data were collected by taking answers from the questionnaire.

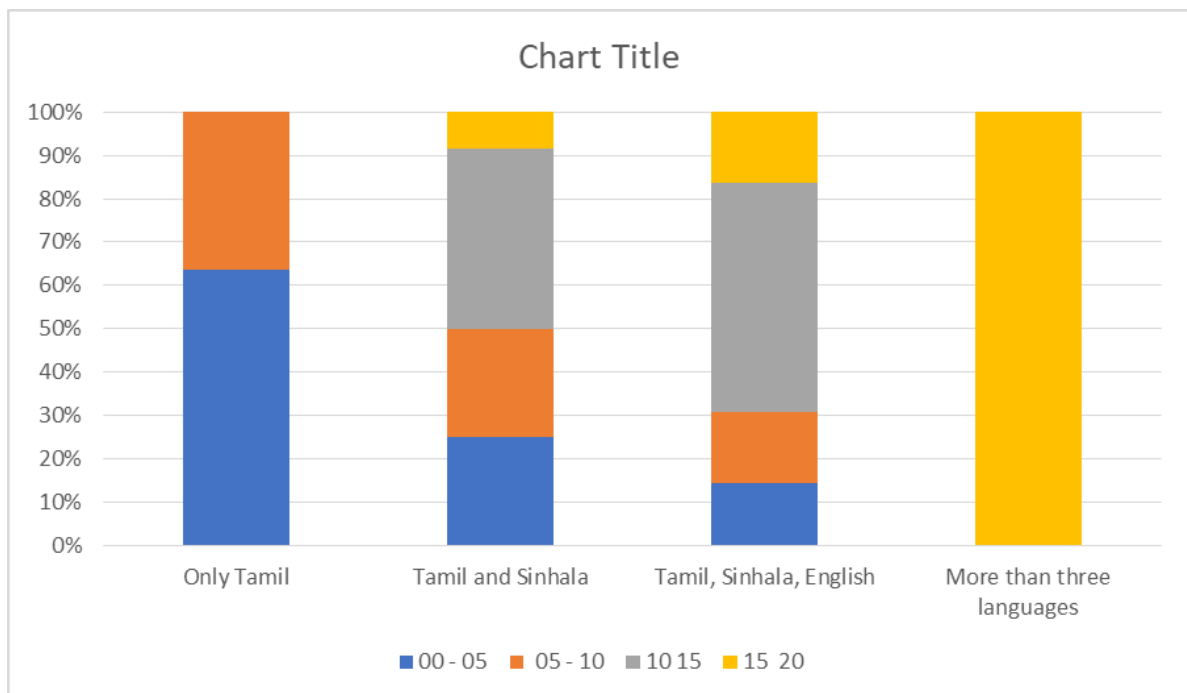


**Fig. 2:** Speaking and writing skills of the participants

By giving the above question to the participants, the researcher wanted to collect the information about the skills that the participants are fully competent. According to that the displayed data talks about the literacy of participants related the respective languages. It shows that 46% are capable of speaking and writing in their native languages. Here the native languages make the sense of the mother tongue Tamil. And also 30% of them are good in speaking and writing in Sinhala, Tamil and English. It shows 20% for the participants who can speak and write both in Sinhala and Tamil while there are 4% of participants can employ more than three languages in speaking and writing.

**Classroom Performance and multilingualism**

The below chart displays the data which was collected through the presentations of the participants. According to that it shows the result with marks level that they obtained for the presentation. The marks were given out of twenty and it has categorized as 00 – 05, 05 – 10, 10 – 15 and 15 – 20. The marks they got and the language ability displays in the below chart. According too that the total number shows as 11 participants have taken marks from 00 – 05 and 15 students have earned from 05 – 10 marks for their presentations. In the same way it shows 21 participants for the marks earned from 10 -15 and finally there are 03 people who have taken from 15 – 20 marks. All this information can be seen in the below chart.



**Fig. 3:** Speaking and writing skills of the participants

When it analyzes data in the above figure, there is 21 participants who earned marks between 10 to 15. This mark has taken by the participants who are able to use three languages including Sinhala, English and Tamil. Indirectly this shows that multilinguals are capable of earning high marks in their classroom performance in the second language classroom.

### Discussion

In this section it shows about the discussion and overall analysis of the data which was collected for the study. Here the study was done to see whether the multilingualism can affect positively for the classroom performance of the English as second language learners. According to that the used research question and the objectives have been fulfilled through the study and the result has been discussed. In the study it has proved that the learners who have scored higher marks from the presentation are multilinguals. There are 21 participants who scored marks between 10 to 15. This has done by the learners who are able to speak and write Sinhala, English and Tamil languages. And also, the followings were found through the study. It shows that multilingualism of the language learners has broaden the opportunities to gather information for the studies. And also, this has developed the presentation skills. Finally, this has enhanced the knowledge of the learners by giving many advantages.

### Limitations

The following limitations has been accounted for this study. Here the study makes the limitations in selecting sample for the study, number of participants, habit of using language and the focused learning category for studies. In case of the sample, the study has selected only 50 students who are learning English as the second language in Eastern university of Sri Lanka. In the same manner participants are the students from the Faculty of Arts and Culture and all these students use Tamil as their native language and learn English as their second language. So, participants are limited to the faculty and the native language that they are speaking and using for their studies. In case of language habit, the study has selected only multilingualism and both monolingualism and bilingualism has been excluded. Learning category has limited to English as the second language learning in the Faculty of Arts and Culture in Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

### Conclusion

As modern linguistics suggests, multilingualism is a phenomenon that cannot avoid in the multicultural society. However, many studies have displayed that multilingualism is natural and should be expected from the people who are living in a multi-cultural societies and communities in the modern world. So, this study has done to see the effects of multilingualism and how this multilingualism helps to enhance the productivity of the English as second language learning classroom. According to that 50 participants have participated for the survey and it has found positive to have important effects for the language learning. So, this is very important for the leachers and scholars to employ their teaching methods in the second language classroom. It has proved that multilingualism can affect for the effective classroom performance.

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