

STUDENTS' CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP AND GOVERNMENT

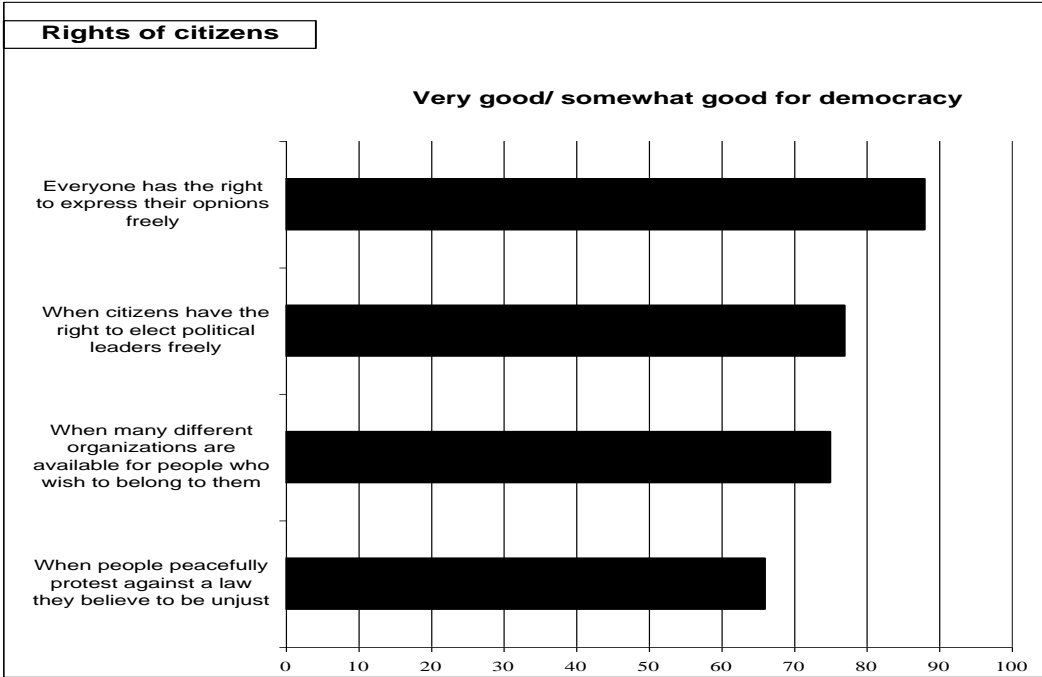
5.0 Introduction

Civic education is more than imparting factual knowledge about democracy, citizenship and government by teaching related concepts and, through the study of systems, institutions, laws and statutes. It is also about developing students' attitudes toward governance enabling students examine critically the concepts of rights and responsibilities, and the meaning of democracy, as defined and as practiced, in systems of governance and in institutions such as school. It is important to understand how students view and define citizenship and how their views are influenced by their educational and social context.

In the IEA civic education study, the attributes students think strengthens democracy, the attributes of good citizenship for adults, and the responsibilities of the government, were measured. Some questions about the principles or pivotal ideas of democracy were formulated with right and wrong answers, for the test. Questions were also included in test items on citizenship - on citizens' rights in particular, and, on some aspects of government. Questions were formulated with more comprehensive coverage of all three aspects, in Part Three of the student questionnaire. This chapter presents and analyzes the responses of students to items measuring their concepts of democracy, citizenship and government, included in Part Three. All data sets are presented both graphically, and in Table form. A Graph indicating the responses in one of the composite categories only, is followed by a Table that presents the data in both composite categories.

5.1 Concept of Democracy

IN the CIVEC study, a measure of the concept of democracy was designed using a rating scale without designated correct or incorrect answers, having consulted the theoretical and research literature to identify the elements that should be included. Items were written to cover several contrasting models of democracy - a generic or rule of law model, a liberalism model, a pluralism model, a participation model, a communitarian model, a social welfare model and an elitism model. The items were phrased in a way that would enable ascertaining whether respondents believed that a given situation or condition would be good or bad for democracy. This formulation allowed the inclusion of items concerning threats to democracy (e.g. political corruption) as well as positive factors (e.g. free elections).



Graph 5.1: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) students on rights of citizens

Table 5.1: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) on rights of citizens and, comparable INT response means

SQ Section A: Democracy Rights of citizens: What is good and what is bad for democracy?	Very bad for democracy/ Somewhat bad for democracy	Somewhat good for democracy/ Very good for democracy	INT mean
A1. Everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, that is	12	88	3.41
A9. When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely, that is	23	77	3.43
A11. When many different organizations are available for people who wish to belong to them, that is	25	75	3.14
A16. When laws that women claim are unfair to them are changed, that is	50	50	2.65
A22. When people peacefully protest against a law they believe to be unjust, that is	34	66	3.07

Two of the items for which SL students show the highest percentage agreement are items for which there is high consensus across countries*, in the CIVED study - that it is good for democracy when citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely (A9), and, when many different organizations are available for people who wish to join them (A11).

The average respondent in the CIVED sample believes that the attribute in A1 is good for democracy, but it is an item that has received ‘moderate’ consensus*; in the SL sample, 77 percent agree that when everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, it is good for democracy. The response of SL respondents to item A16 is equally divided between the two composite response categories. Likewise, the international mean for this item is in the ‘mixed’ range, meaning that some country means are in the ‘good for democracy’ range and some, in the ‘bad for democracy’ range. For item A22, the international mean is at the lower end of the scale indicating belief that the attribute is good for democracy. There is agreement by 66 percent SL respondents to this item. In general, the response pattern of SL respondents compares well with comparable responses of the international CIVED sample.

**In the CIVED study items were classified into three categories, ‘high level of consensus’, ‘moderate consensus’ and ‘lack of consensus’, according to the range, from the highest to the lowest country mean; less than .70, .70-1.00, greater than 1.00 respectively. Means of 3.00-3.99 are interpreted as indicating that the average respondent believes that the attribute is good for democracy, means between 2.00 and 2.99 are classified as ‘mixed’ (usually meaning that some country means are in the ‘good for democracy’ range and some in the ‘bad for democracy’ range). Means between 1.00 and 1.99 are interpreted as indicating that the average respondent believes that the attribute is ‘bad for democracy’ (p73).*



Graph 5.2: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) students on negative influences

Table 5.2: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) and International (NT) students on negative influences

SQ Section A: Democracy Rights of citizens: Negative influences What is good and what is bad for democracy?	Very bad for democracy/ Somewhat bad for democracy	Somewhat good for democracy/ Very good for democracy	INT means
A3. When political leaders in power give jobs in the government to members of their family, that is	77	23	1.85
A6. When one company owns all the newspapers, that is	66	34	1.85
A10. When courts and judges are influenced by politicians, that is	79	21	1.73
A17. When all the television stations present the same opinions about politics, that is	63	37	2.16
A20. When wealthy business people have more influence on government than others, that is	77	23	1.62

Three of the items in this scale have strong consensus across countries, referring to attributes that the respondents judge to be bad for democracy - A6, A10, A20; monopoly newspaper ownership, political influence in the judicial sphere, and special influence by the wealthy on the government. The international means for the two items A3 and A17 are in the 'mixed' range, indicating that some country means are in the 'good for democracy' range and some, in the 'bad for democracy'

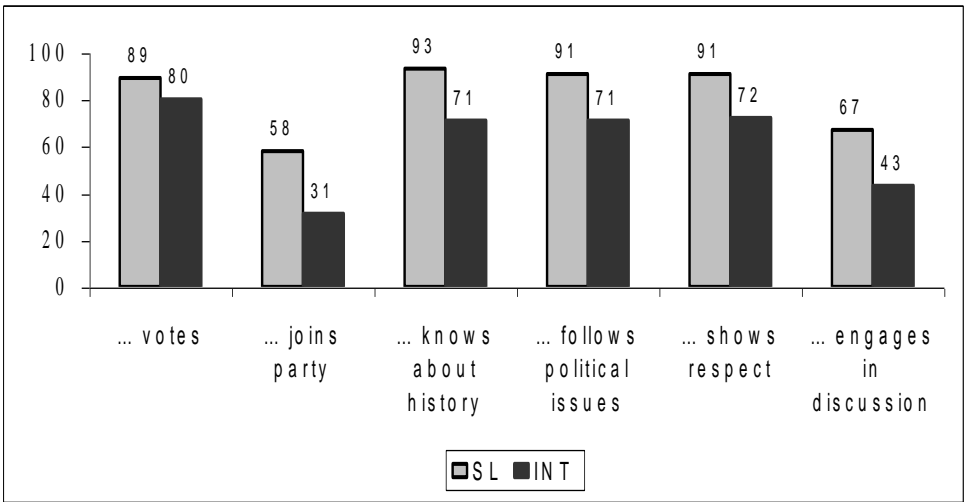
range. The responses of SL students indicate that for all 5 items, there is agreement that the attributes are bad for democracy, with responses ranging between 63-79 percent.

5.2 Concept of Citizenship

The dimensions of citizenship and ways to create the qualities of good citizen in young people were central concerns in the CIVED Phase I case studies. One sub domain of the democracy and democratic institutions domain focuses on citizenship. When questions were formulated with right and wrong answers (Part I) citizens rights were included whereas the concepts scale focuses attention on responsibilities. In this section the concern is on the concept of good citizen for adults that young people actually have. Confirmatory factor analysis (in the international CIVED study) revealed two factors; the importance of conventional citizenship (six items) and importance of social-movement-related citizenship (four items) - the term ‘social movements’ refers to non-partisan mainstream groups acting in communities.

The concept of citizenship was measured by two scales: an ‘importance of conventional citizenship’ scale and an ‘importance of social movement-related scale’. Students were given a list of activities, attitudes and actions on each scale and asked to report how important they believed each one was for explaining what a good citizen is or does.

5.2.1 Importance of Conventional Citizenship



Graph 5.3: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether various behaviors are somewhat important/very important, to be good citizens

Table 5.3: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) and international (INT) students on what a good adult citizen is or does

Section B: Good Citizens An adult who is a good citizen...	Not important/ Somewhat unimportant		Somewhat important/ Very important		Sum
	SL	INT	SL	INT	SL/INT
B2. ...votes in every election	11	20	89	80	100
B3. ...joins a political party	42	69	58	31	100
B6. ...knows about the country's history	07	29	93	71	100
B8. ...follows political issues in the newspaper, radio, or TV	09	29	91	71	100
B10. ...shows respect for government representatives	09	28	91	72	100
B12. ...engages in political discussions	33	57	67	43	100

Most students thought that knowing about the country's history (93 percent), following political issues (91 percent) and, showing respect for government leaders were the three most important factors in being good citizens. There is and has always been, an over-whelming significance of the country's history in power politics. Likewise, there is a necessity to follow closely political issues in the country as the citizen's everyday life is significantly impacted by politics. Considering also that there is a sense of resignation to the reality in the country that little can be achieved by legitimate citizen's rights than by showing respect to government leaders, fourteen year olds in Sri Lanka show considerable political commonsense, by reporting an overall 90 per cent agreement that these are important for good citizenship.

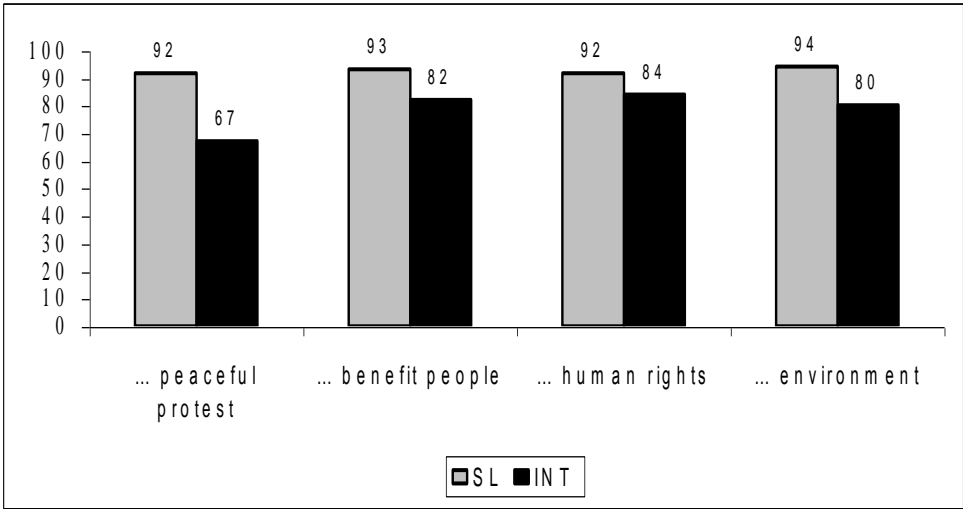
Voting in every election was considered important in demonstrating good citizenship by 89 per cent of the students. Engaging in political discussion was considered important by 67 per cent of students and, joining a political party, only by 58 per cent; thus when it comes to pro-active political participation, a considerable percentage of students seem to prefer the role of onlooker than player.

5.2.2 Importance of Social movement-related citizenship

A three-item scale measures the concept of social movement-related citizenship. To all three items in this scale the response by students is over 90 percent, indicating that in their perception, participation in these social movement-related activities is important for good citizenship. Human rights, Environment and Community service are three areas of concern currently being focused on intensively in schools, and in the larger society. Students have demonstrated their awareness of the importance of these concerns for good citizenship.

Table 5.4: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether participation in social-movement related activities is important or unimportant for good citizenship

Section B: Good Citizens An adult who is a good citizen...	Not important/ Somewhat unimportant		Somewhat important/ Very important		Sum
	SL	INT	SL	INT	
B5. would participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust	08	33	92	67	100
B9. participates in activities to benefit people in the community	07	18	93	82	100
B11. takes part in activities promoting human rights	08	16	92	84	100
B13. takes part in activities to protect the Environment	06	20	94	80	100



Graph 5.4: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether participation in social-movement related activities is important for good citizenship

When responses to the two scales on the concept of citizenship are considered in synthesis, in the CIVED study, across countries, the items relating to participation in social movement groups were more likely to be endorsed as important for citizenship than conventional citizenship activities. For example, 80 percent or more have responded in the combined category ‘somewhat important/very important’ to only 4 of the 10 items in the two scales, of which only one, voting in every election, is a conventional citizenship activity. Over 80 percent SL students, on the contrary, have responded to 8 of the 10 activities in the combined category ‘somewhat important/very important’, which includes 4 of the activities in the conventional citizenship scale

and, all 4 items in the social movement related citizenship scale. To the two items, joining a political party and engaging in political discussions, the INT students' responses in the combined category 'somewhat important/very important' are in the minority whereas the SL student responses remain in the majority.

The finding in the CIVED study is that

14 year olds are more likely to include social movement participation than more conventional political activities in their concepts of good citizenship for adults. Voting is important to these young people, but activities that imply conflict of opinions (political party membership and political discussion) are not highly rated, on the average (p.79).

The findings in the CESL study is that both social movement related participation and conventional political activities are included in SL students' concept of good citizenship for adults, with more importance accorded to voting than to activities that imply conflict of opinions.

5.3 Concept of government

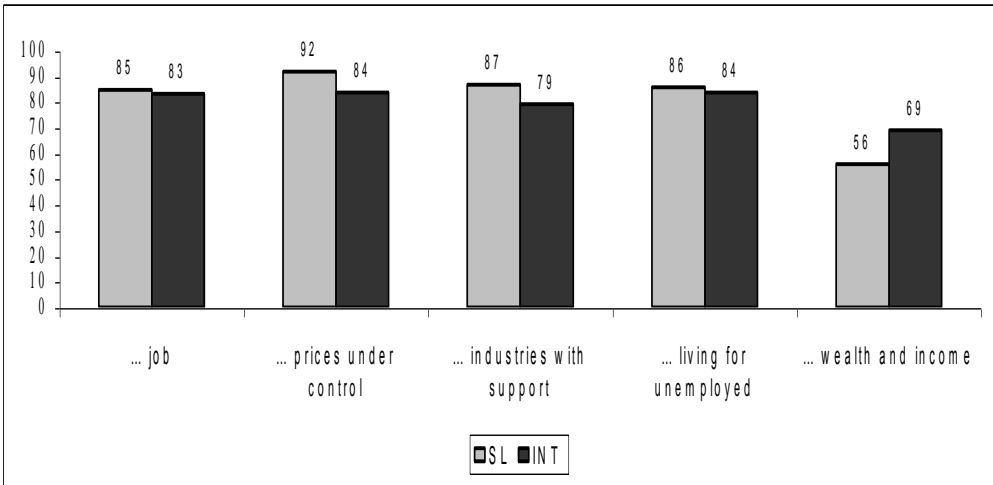
Understanding the responsibilities of the individual and the government is fundamental to civic education. In Sri Lanka, governmental responsibility for the provision of health and education, employment generation, support for economic growth, are crucial issues on which the effectiveness of governments is assessed periodically. In this study, two scales measuring distinct concepts of governmental responsibility are included: an economy related scale and a society related scale.

5.3.1 Economy-related scale

Five items make up the economy-related government responsibility scale. The total percentage responses of students in both the CIVED and CESL studies, in the composite response category probably should/ definitely should be the government's responsibility are presented in Graph 5.5, and the data in both composite response categories, given in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether various economy related actions should or should not be the responsibility of the government

Section C: Government Economy-related government responsibilities	Definitely should not be/ Probably should not be the government's responsibility		Probably should/ Definitely should be the government's responsibility		Sum
	SL	INT	SL	INT	SL/INT
C1. To guarantee a job for everyone who wants one	15	17	85	83	100
C2. To keep prices under control	08	16	92	84	100
C5. To provide industries with the support they need to grow	13	21	87	79	100
C6. To provide an adequate standard of living for the unemployed	14	16	86	84	100
C7. To reduce differences in income and wealth among people	44	30	56	69	100



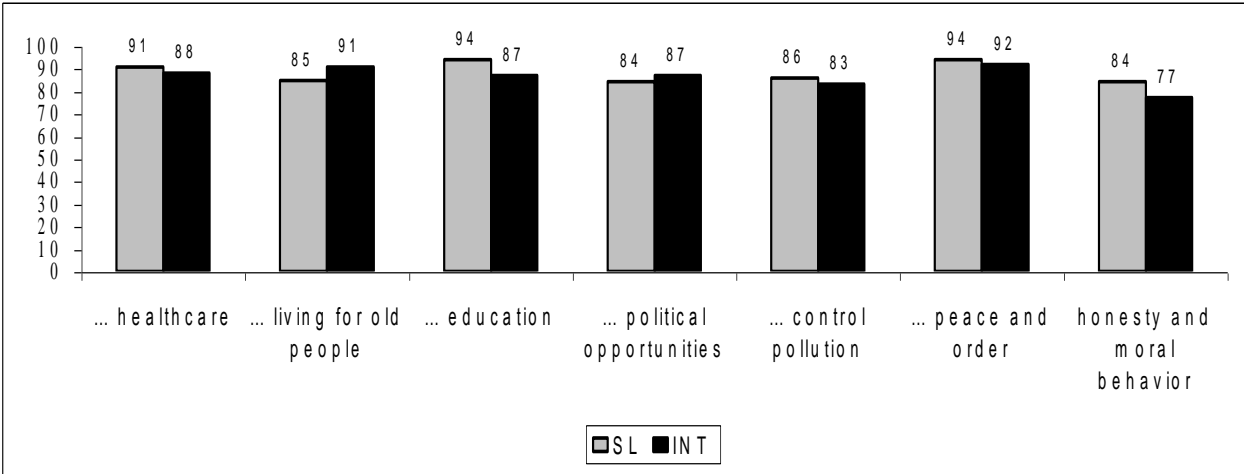
Graph 5.5: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether various economic-related actions should be the responsibility of the government

Keeping prices under control, providing industries with the support they need to grow, providing an adequate standard of living for the unemployed and, guaranteeing a job for everyone who wants one, when considered together, should be the responsibility of government as reported by 88 percent of the students. The percentage of SL students who consider reducing the differences in income and wealth among people a responsibility of the government is lower than the percentage of students in the CIVED study, perhaps a reflection that the concept of an open economy is gaining ground over that of the welfare state.

5.3.2 Society-related government responsibility

Table 5.6: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether various socially related actions should or should not be the responsibility of the government

Section C: Government What responsibilities should the government have?	Definitely should not/ Probably should not be the government's responsibility		Probably should/ Definitely should be the government's responsibility		Sum SL/INT
	SL	INT	SL	INT	
C3. To provide basic healthcare for everyone	09	12	91	88	100
C4. To provide an adequate standard of living for old people	15	09	85	91	100
C8. To provide free basic education for all	10	13	94	87	100
C9. To ensure equal political opportunities for men and women	16	13	84	87	100
C10. To control pollution of the environment	14	17	86	83	100
C11. To guarantee peace and order within the Country	06	08	94	92	100
C12. To promote honesty and moral behavior among the people in the country	16	23	84	77	100



Graph 5.6: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether various socially related actions should be the responsibility of the government

In the CIVED study, it is stated in summary that only about 10 percent of the students say that economy and society related activities definitely should not be the government’s responsibility. In general, 14 year olds are more likely to think of societal items rather than economic items as the government’s responsibility. The items most frequently endorsed as definitely government responsibilities are ‘to guarantee order and stability within the country’, ‘to provide free basic education for all’, and ‘to provide basic healthcare for everyone’. The two least endorsed items

are ‘to reduce differences in income and wealth among people’ and ‘to provide industries with the support they need to grow’. The findings in the CESL study are almost identical. There is a difference only in the least endorsed item, in the CESL study.

5.4 Summary

The findings in Chapter five, on SL students’ concepts of democracy, citizenship and government are in general, compare well with findings in the CIVED study. The response pattern of SL students is in general consistent with the pattern of responses of the INT student sample, on the concepts of democracy, citizenship and government. On the concept of democracy, citizens’ freedom to express opinions, free elections, strong civil society in the form of organizations are attributes that the sample of students in the CIVED study and the vast majority of SL students believe to be good for democracy. Likewise, attributes that are judged to be bad for democracy by strong consensus across countries, in the CIVED study, such as monopoly newspaper ownership, political influence in the judicial sphere, and special influence by the wealthy on the government are similarly judged by the SL student respondents.

On the concept of citizenship, across countries, the items relating to participation in social movement groups were more likely to be endorsed as important for citizenship than conventional citizenship activities. The findings in the CESL study is that both social movement related participation and conventional political activities are included in the SL students’ concept of good citizenship for adults, with more importance accorded to voting than to activities that imply conflict of opinions such as joining a political party and engaging in political discussions.

On the concept of government, the findings of both the CIVED and CESL studies are very similar. Only a very small percentage of the students in both studies say that economy and society related activities definitely should not be the government’s responsibility. In general, 14 year olds are more likely to think of societal items rather than economic items as the government’s responsibility. In the responses of the SL students, there are signs that with the young, the concept of an open economy is gaining ground over the strongly held protectionist affiliation to the concept of welfare state.