

CHAPTER 6

ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARD THE NATION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

6.0 Introduction

The international CIVED study probed the attitudes, values and beliefs of students in all three major domains of the study, i) democracy and democratic institutions, ii) national identity and iii) social cohesion and diversity. This chapter focuses on the attitudes of students pertaining to two of the domains – democracy and democratic institutions and, national identity. The attitudes pertaining to the third domain, social cohesion and diversity are presented and analyzed in chapter 7. Students’ trust in government related institutions, support or alienation – touching more specifically on national feeling and attachment to the country and its political symbols, students’ attitudes toward the country as reflected in their attitudes on international relations are presented and analyzed in this chapter.

6.1 Trust in government related institutions

Research about democracy and democratic institutions emphasizes the extent to which students trust political institutions, believe that citizens can influence government decisions, and possess political tolerance.

In both 2003 and 2017 Civ Ed studies had 14 items listed in the Student questionnaire to check students’ attitudes towards variety of Government related institutions.

Table 6.1 indicates the students’ responses in 2017.

Table 6.1: Percentage responses of SL students indicating trust in Institutions - 2017

SQ_Part IV - Section D	Never/Only some of the time	Most of the time/ always	Don't know
D1 - The National Government	34	51	15
D2 - Provincial Council	33	55	12
D3 - Local Government	32	58	10
D4 - Courts	22	72	6
D5 - The Police	17	79	4
D6 - Military	16	78	5
D7 - News on Television	28	67	5
D8 - News on the radio	29	66	6
D9 - News in the press	35	58	8
D10 - News online	44	46	10
D11 - Political parties	52	36	12
D12 - Schools	9	87	4
D13 - Parliament	36	51	12
D14 - The people of Sri Lanka	22	68	10

As Table 6.1 indicates, it is a positive sign that the highest percentage of students (87%) claim that most of the time they trust the school. This is followed by the military, the police, the courts and the people of Sri Lanka.

A six-item scale measured 9th graders' trust in a variety of government related institutions, in the CIVED study. The same scale was used in the CESL (2003).

In general, a higher percentage of SL students, relative to INT students have indicated trust in all institutions listed in this scale, with the Courts and Police having a slight edge over the institutions of governance, the Parliament, National and Local Government.

In synthesis, the CIVED study reports that “fourteen year-olds across countries are moderately trusting of their government institutions, courts and the police are trusted the most, followed by national and local governments. In contrast, political parties are trusted very little” (p.92). The findings in the CESL 2003 study conform to the same pattern.

Table 6.2 indicates the students responses in 2003 and 2017 denoting their trust in the six institutions listed in the scale. It also indicates the students' responses to six institutions listed in the international study.

Table 6.2: Percentage responses of SL and INT students indicating trust in Institutions – 2003 & 2017

SQ_Part IV - Section D	Never/ only some of the time			Most of the time/ always		
	SL-2003	SL-2017	INT	SL-2003	SL-2017	INT
National government	39	34	52	61	51	48
Local government	38	32	46	62	58	54
Courts	27	22	36	73	72	64
Police	33	17	35	67	79	65
Political parties	67	52	72	33	36	28
Parliament	38	36	49	62	51	51

The comparison indicates that in both years the students seem to trust the police and courts more than other institutions. However in 2017 students trust in the national government and parliament had reduced.

Section E of the student questionnaire had 12 items pertaining to our country. These items measured students' attitude towards national identity, the country and towards international relations. Section 6.2 discusses the attitude towards national identity.

6.2 Attitudes toward national identity

The international CIVED study measured students' attitudes toward national identity through a four-item scale, E3, E7, E9 and, E11. The responses of students to a number of items in this section on 'Our Country' indicate their attitudes toward the nation such as patriotism, loyalty and sense of pride.

Table 6.3 present the responses of the two student samples to the four items in the scale on national identity. Table 6.3 also shows the response percentages of the student sample in the CESL study to 4 other items in section E.

Table 6.3: percentage responses of SL and INT students indicating attitudes toward country - 2003

SQ_Part IV - Section E: Our Country	Strongly disagree/ disagree		Agree/ strongly agree		Sum
	SL	INT	SL	INT	SL/INT
[Four item Scale on national identity]					
E3 - The flag of this country is important to me	05	18	95	82	100
E7 - I have great love for this country	05	13	95	87	100
E9 - This country should be proud of what it has	14	14	86	86	100
E11 - I would prefer to live permanently in another country	74	77	26	23	100
Section E: Our Country	Strongly disagree/ disagree		Agree/ strongly agree		Sum
	SL		SL		SL
E10 - The national anthem of Sri Lanka is important to me	05		95		100
E6 - There is little to be proud of in Sri Lanka's history	70		30		100
E5- Sri Lanka should be respected by other countries for what it has accomplished	13		87		100
E8 - People should support their country even if they think their country is doing something wrong	34		66		100

In the CESL study, two of the items in the national identity scale, E3 and E7 have received the highest positive responses from students. In indicating the same high percentage response of 95 percent to item E10, students have considered the national anthem as equally important to them as the national flag. By 74 and 70 percent disagreement with the two negatively worded items E11 and E6 respectively, students indicate that they neither prefer to live in another country, nor lack pride in Sri Lanka's history. On the contrary, 86 percent take pride in what Sri Lanka has achieved, and 87 percent believe that other countries should respect Sri Lanka for what it has accomplished, as indicated in their responses to items E9 and E5 respectively.

Table 6.4 indicates a similar trend in responses in 2017.

Table 6.4: Percentage responses of SL students indicating attitudes toward country - 2017

SQ_P.IV- Section E	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Agree/strongly agree	Don't know
E3 - The flag of this country is important to me	6	91	4
E7 - I have great love for this country	5	91	4
E9 - This country should be proud of what it has achieved	12	74	14
E11 - I would prefer to live permanently In another country	64	27	8
	strongly disagree/ disagree	agree/strongly agree	don't know
E10 - The national anthem of Sri Lanka is important to me	6	91	3
E6 - There is little to be proud of Sri Lanka's history	53	39	9
E5 - Sri Lanka should be respected by other countries for what it has accomplished	13	76	11
E8 - People should support their country even if they think their country is doing something wrong	39	51	10

However, it is interesting to note that 14% of students are not certain that “This country should be proud of what it has achieved”.

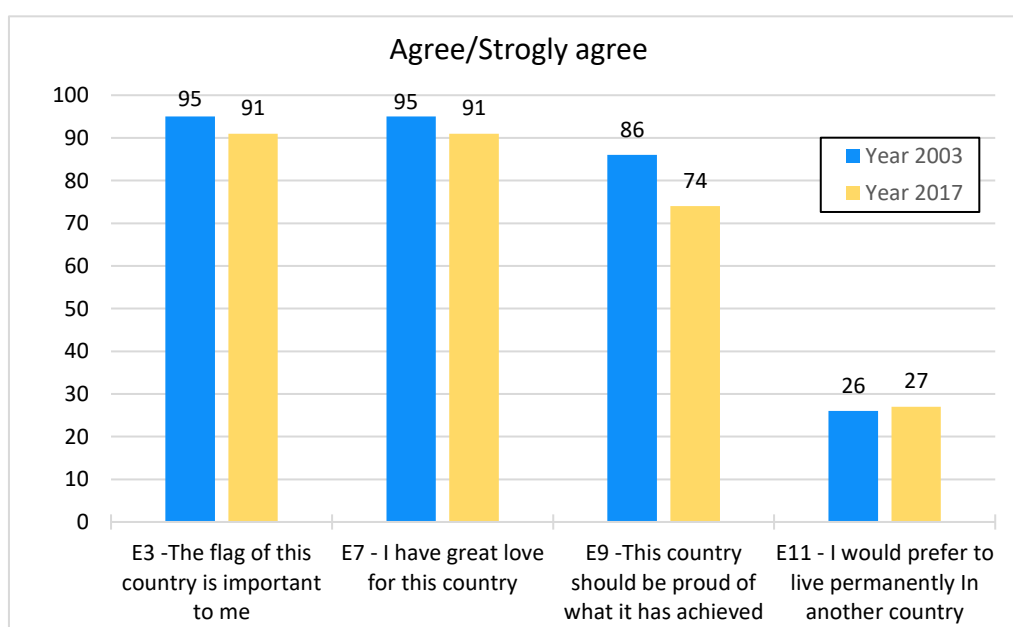


Fig. 6.1: Percentage responses of students indicating attitudes towards country

In synthesizing the findings pertaining to student attitudes in this domain, the CIVED study states that “in almost all the participating countries the average young person seems to have a sense of trust or attachment either to the country as a political community or to government institutions (or both)” and, a positive sense of national identity. This statement (p. 92) applies equally to the student samples in the CESL study 2003 and 2017 as well.

6.3 Attitudes toward international relations

The attitudes of students toward international relations and the degree to which they think their country should be influenced by other countries is measured by four items. The responses of the student sample in the CESL study are presented in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Percentage responses of CESL students indicating attitudes toward international relations - 2003

Section E: Our Country	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Agree/ strongly agree
International relations	SL	SL
E1 - To help protect jobs in Sri Lanka we should buy products made in Sri Lanka	22	78
E2 - We should prevent other countries from trying to influence political decisions in Sri Lanka	31	69
E4 - We should always be alert and stop threats from other countries to Sri Lanka's political independence	09	91
E12 - We should stop outsiders from influencing Sri Lanka's traditions and culture	13	87

A strong national feeling is reflected in their responses to these four statements, with response percentages ranging from 69 to 91. The vast majority of students are in agreement that threats from other countries to the country’s political independence, traditions and culture in particular should be averted. More than a third of the students believe that other countries should be prevented from influencing Sri Lanka’s political decisions. Likewise, pro-active patriotism comes through in their response to item E1, that Sri Lankans should buy products made in Sri Lanka, to protect jobs.

As indicated in Table 6.6 a similar trend in responses is shown in 2017. However, 14% of students do not know “Whether we should prevent other countries from trying to influence political decisions in Sri Lanka”.

Table 6.6: Percentage responses of students in 2017 indicating attitudes toward international relations

Section E: Our Country	strongly disagree/ disagree	agree/ strongly agree	don't know
E1 - To help protect jobs in Sri Lanka we should buy products made in Sri Lanka	21	70	9
E2 - We should prevent other countries from trying to influence political decisions in Sri Lanka	21	64	14
E4 - We should always be alert and stop threats from other countries to Sri Lanka's political independence	10	81	9
E12 - We should stop outsiders from influencing Sri Lanka's traditions and culture	13	77	10

6.4 Summary

To gauge the attitudes of students’ in two of the domains – democracy and democratic institutions and, national identity, responses to items dealing with their trust in government related institutions and attitudes toward the nation and international relations were solicited.

The trust indicated by students in the civic education samples in both 2003 and 2017 relative to comparable data from the CIVED study indicate that, a higher percentage of SL students have indicated trust in the government related institutions listed. As summarized in the CIVED study, fourteen year-olds across countries including Sri Lanka are moderately trusting of their government institutions. The comparison between 2003 and 2017 indicates that even though in both years the students seem to trust the military and the police more than other institutions, in 2017 most trusted institution is the school. In contrast, political parties are trusted very little.

In almost all the participating countries, including Sri Lanka, the average young person seems to have a sense of trust or attachment either to the country as a political community or to government institutions or both and, a positive sense of national identity. A higher percentage of Sri Lankan students, relative to the international sample, have responded positively to most items in the scales on national identity and, international relations. A strong national feeling and a proactive patriotic stance is reflected in the positive responses of SL students to items in the scale on international relations. Given the trend in the country for young adults in particular to seek greener pastures elsewhere, and the degree of disillusionment evident among citizens in general the attitudes of fourteen-year olds are promising and signal hopes for the future.