An Analysis of Initiatives Taken to Build Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka

Chamila Mallawaarachchi[1]

Abstract

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country which encountered a devastating civil war for 26 years. Although war ended in 2009, Sri Lanka is still far from reaching positive peace, as ethnic disharmony and national disintegration adversely affect the nation-building process. The Ministry of Education has formulated the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (ESCP) in 2008 to support national integration among different groups in Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Education has taken initiatives under the recommendations of the National Policy to build social cohesion through peace and multicultural education. This study examines the progress of initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education to build social cohesion in Sri Lanka. A survey was conducted covering 300 respondents or stakeholders of education to find out their perceptions on social cohesion and peace. Then, perceptions were analyzed to see whether they match with the objectives of the National Policy to evaluate, to what extent respondents have absorbed and accepted the message given through these initiatives for 10 years, since the formation of the National Policy in 2008 to 2018.

Keywords: Peace, Social Cohesion, The Ministry of Education, The National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace

1 Introduction

Ethnic disharmony and national disintegration are major challenges in Sri Lanka which is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups. This condition adversely affects the nation's development. No significant progress has been made in Sri Lanka in national integration and development, although 10 years have passed after ending its internal war in 2009. Sri Lankan education policies already during the war, have included notions of social cohesion and peace aimed at ethnic and religious reconciliation. For example the General Education Reforms of 1997 proposed a new emphasis within pre-service and in-service teacher education on human values, human rights, national cohesion, democratic principles, gender rights, the environment, and language skills in all three languages[2] (ESCP, 2008). But, there are constraints in applying these values due to highly competitive, exam oriented education system in Sri Lanka. Thus, the education does not actively promote nation-building through integration, but divides people further. Stemmed from such continuing issues and due to lacked coherence and coordination of various peace education initiatives, the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (ESCP) was formulated in 2008. The policy is centered in the Peace Education and Reconciliation Unit (PERU) of the Ministry of Education. Under this policy, activities are conducted in seven strategic areas: curriculum, teacher education, second national language, whole school culture, integration, co-curriculum and research. A survey was conducted covering five out of nine provinces of Sri Lanka with stakeholders of education including policy makers, educators and students. These stakeholders represent government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which are responsible in implementing programmes for social cohesion and peace.

---

[1] Osaka Jogakuin University Graduate School, 2-26-54, Tamatsukuri, Chuo-ward, Osaka-city, Japan. E-mail: marachchi@yahoo.com. Tele-+819090986517

[2] Two official languages in Sri Lanka are Sinhala and Tamil and Englishisthe linking language.

The National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace has provided a backdrop for the activities of some NGOs (ESCP review report, 2016). Therefore, the NGOs that are conducting programmes based on the objectives of the National Policy are concerned in this research. Data collected from the respondents of this research on their perceptions of social cohesion and peace and aboutthe practical existence of social cohesion and peace in Sri Lanka.

This article first explains the initiatives taken under the National Policy to implement social cohesion and peace in Sri Lanka. Then, compatibility of perceptions of respondents with policy objectives is examined. It is expected to evaluate the success of policy initiatives, seeing to what extent respondents accept them assuming that their respective actions are shaped by perceptions.

2 Theoretical Framework: Education for Social Cohesion and Peace

International organizations engaged in peace work in the world have recognized the importance of education in bringing world peace. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) mentions that, "education directs to the full development of the human personality, strengthens respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and promotes understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and furthers "the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace." The promotion of peace and peace education is an essential component ofthe UNICEF's mandate to work for the rights and well-being of children and developing a peace education initiative with community involvement, will help to create a harmonious and rights-respectful society (Fountain, 1999).

Charles Webel presents three spheres of peace: inner peace (intrapersonal peace), interpersonal peace and outer peace which are dynamic processes and in continuous interaction (Webel in Webel&Galtung, 2007). According to Charles Webel, inner peace is calmness of mind and heart, interpersonal peace is harmony between people in daily interactions and outer peace is sociopolitical, domestic and international peace. Hanh (1987) says that if we are not happy, if we are not peaceful, we can't share peace and happiness with others. This indicates that inner peace (intrapersonal peace) is visible through our perceptions and actions towards others and how it affects interpersonal peace and outer peace. Johnson & Johnson (2014) saysthat the ultimate goal of peace education is for individuals to be able to maintain intrapersonal peace, interpersonal peace, intergroup peace and international peace.

The Constitution of UNESCO (1945) declares that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." So, peace education should ideally involve the entire community (Fountain (1999). 19th century Humanist and educator Maria Montessori believed that children need peace education as they naturally absorb the spirit of violence in the atmosphere and will grow to be the next generation of perpetrators of violence (Balasooriya, 2001). According to UNESCO (2015), it is not enough to have peace education only in the formal school curriculum, but the entire system should convey the message of peace directly or indirectly. This indicates the importance of teaching peace through formal school curriculum and non-formal initiatives. Non-formal education should focus about youth, as Cardozo (2006) quotes that youth are vulnerable to social vices. Moreover, during emergency situations or right after conflict a lack of livelihood opportunities forces many young people into violence, and sometimes even a life of crime Balasooriya (2001). Bush &Saltarelli (2000) emphasize the importance of community participation in peace education suggesting that parents should involve directly in the schooling of their children. Davies (2015) says that children's experiences of war-driven relationships and human rights abuses in a post-conflict society may not match the messages of harmony and reconciliation they receive in the classroom, if parents and the community does not aware about such things.

3 Context of the Research Destination-Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country composed of a Sinhala-Buddhist majority and a Tamil-Hindu minority along with other small minorities of Christians and Muslims. The island encountered a devastating civil war for 26 years, as an ethnic Tamil separatist group fought against the Sinhala majority dominated Sri Lankan government. The country is divided into nine provinces for the administrative and educational purposes. Sri Lankan Tamil-Hindus predominate the Northern Province and maintain a significant presence in the Eastern Province. Indian Tamils are the descendants of laborers brought from Southern India by the British in the 19th century to work in tea estates and are concentrated in the parts of the Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces. Sinhalese Buddhists predominate in all parts of the country except the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Muslims have a significant concentration in the Eastern Province, but are scattered throughout the country.

Emergence of ethnic politics is one of the root causes of the ethnic conflict and at present also a major hindrance to reconciliation. Sri Lanka was under three colonial powers; Portuguese, Dutch and British from 16th century until its independence in 1948. Dutch and British colonial rule executed "divide and rule policy" making ethnicity into a separating base for economic and political representation, seemingly privileging the Tamil minority at the expense of the Sinhalese majority. Gradually, politics became separated along ethnic lines. Frustrated social groups formed againstthe post-independence government, due to their inability in generating adequate opportunities. As a result the Tamil separatist movement   started parallel to the Sinhalese youth rebellion in 1970s, aimed at changing the existing political regime. However, Tamil separatist movement   which has been depicted as an ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil communities turned to a full-scale armed war in 1983, aimed at setting up a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government earned a military victory in 2009 over Tamil separatists, leaving behind the root causes of the conflict almost unsolved. In this arena, education has a major role to play in post-conflict peacebuilding in Sri Lanka to achieve Positive peace which denotes the simultaneous presence of many desirable states of mind and society, such as harmony, justice and equity   (Webel in Webel&Galtung, 2007).

4 Research Design and Methodology: Practical Application of Theories

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze perceptions of respondents or stakeholders of peace education on social cohesion and peace in Sri Lanka. Data was collected through interviews and a questionnaire survey.

In this research, respondents' perceptions are compared with the objectives of the National Policy on Social Cohesion and Peace, assuming that their respective actions on social cohesion and peace are based on their perceptions. The EURED Teacher Training Programme (2002) designed for a European Peace Education course mentions that, self-evaluation undertaken by persons acting in pedagogical situations will help them to better understand the causes for their own actions to arrange future actions more reasonably.   In this research, expressing of self-perceptions by respondents (educators as well as learners) is assumed as a self-evaluation about the pedagogy. Perceptions reflect the co-creation of knowledge by learners along with educators about the pedagogy. Presenting an approach to education called "conscientization,"   Brazilian educator Paulo Freire   says that the co-creation of knowledge by learners will   in turn shape the persons and the society (Freire, 1970).

In this research, the compatibility of respondents' perceptions with the objectives of the National Policy are concerned to see, whether actions taken under the recommendations of the National Policy are effective in building social cohesion and peace in Sri Lanka.

4.2 The National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (ESCP)

The National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace was formulated in 2008 from the view that various peace education initiatives in the country lacked coherence and coordination.The policy is centered in the Peace Education and Reconciliation Unit (PERU) of the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka. The structure of the National   Policy is designed covering seven key strategic areas identified in the promotion of social cohesion and peace: (1) curriculum, (2) teacher education, (3) second national language, (4) co-curriculum, (5) whole school, (6) integration and (7) research strategy. The Review Report of this policy which issues in 2016 is also considered in this research.

Figure 1: The Structure of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace [Source: ESCP (2008)]
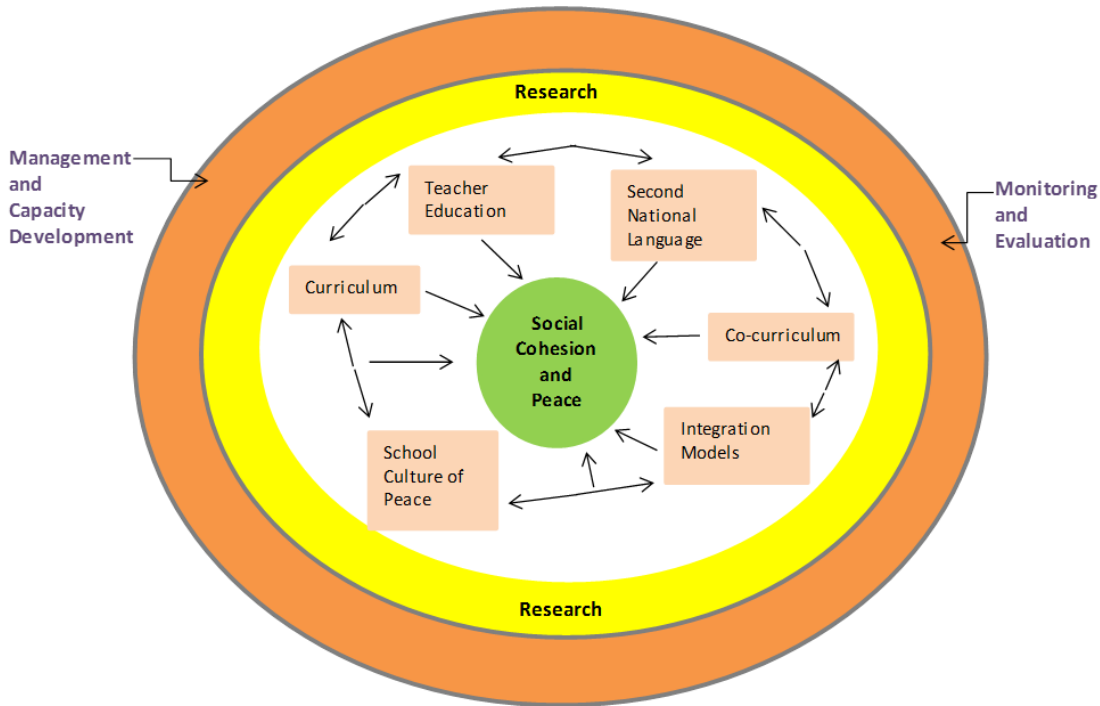

Curriculum reinforces the importance of education for social cohesion and peace through citizenship Education. Under **Teacher Education**, curriculum, manuals and other materials for teacher training are developed to ensure that every teacher is exposed to the goals of the National Policy, and can work to promote social cohesion and peace concepts in their curriculum subjects. Under, **Second National Language (2NL)[3]**, it is expected to develop provisions of 2NL, through the development of a clear policy and the establishment of a specific National College of Education for 2NL teachers. **Whole School Culture** focuses on developing a school culture and ethos that fosters peace and respect for rights, in the school and the community. **Integration** promotes further integrated schools (for different religious and ethnic groups). If it is not physically possible, more ways of linking schools and sharing experiences through twinning schools are considered. It is expected to give every child a peace experience through integration. **Co-curriculum** aims to link with outside agencies through co-curricular activities, and use events and dialogues to promote intercultural understanding as well as skills of living in a democratic society. **Research** aimed at the creation of a research network, to bring researchers in education for social cohesion and peace together.

The main objective of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace is to produce a citizen who is having certain qualities to live in harmony in a multicultural society. Figure 2 depicts these desired qualities. It is expected to find out, to what extent the respondents of this research have absorbed these qualities.

---

[3] For Sinhala medium students 2NL is Tamil and for Tamil medium students 2NL is Sinhala.

Figure 2: Desired Citizen who is a product of ESCP [created by the author based on data in ESCP (2008)]
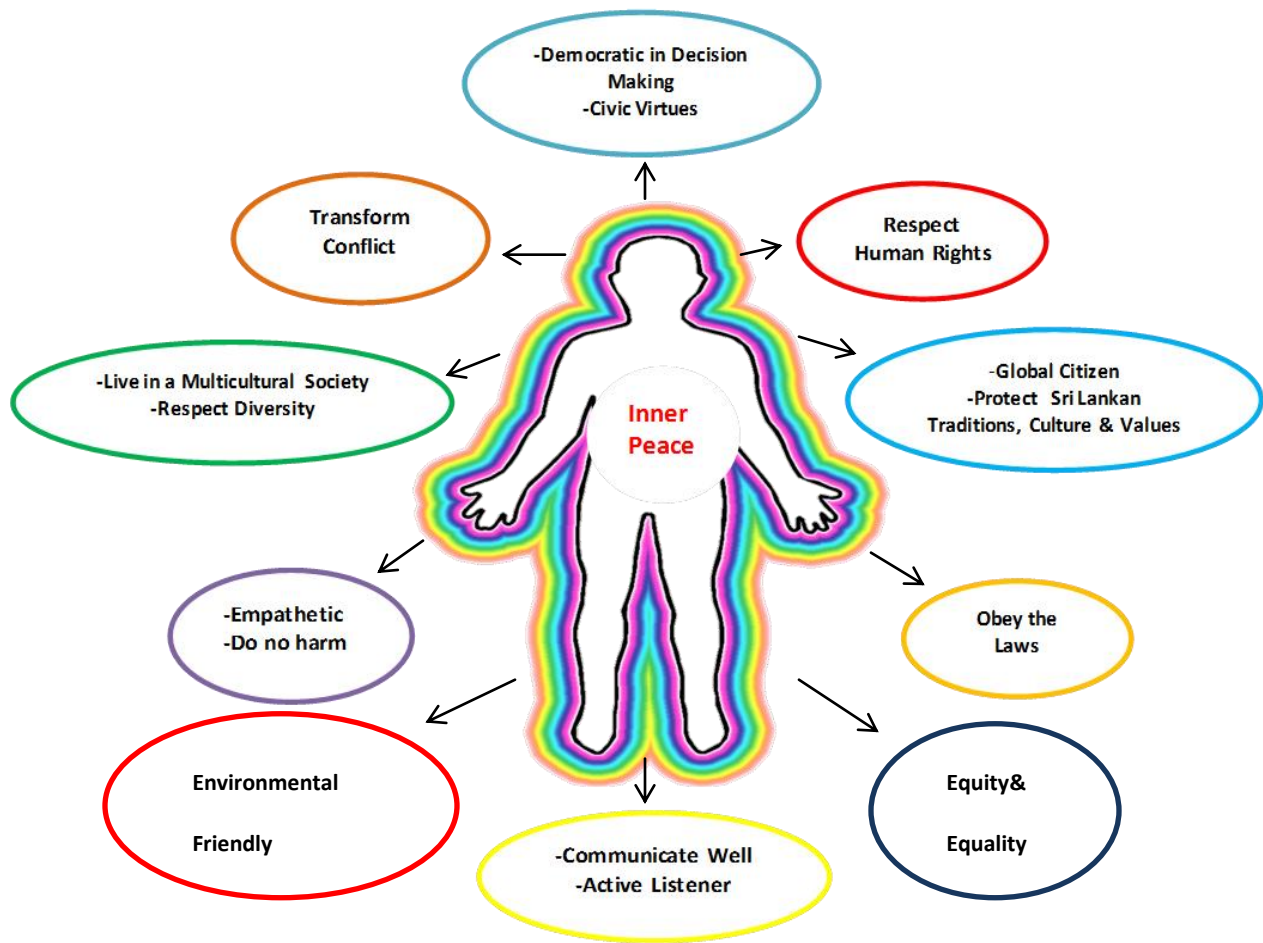
4.3 Research Respondents

All research respondents are stakeholders of education. They are divided in to two main groups: (1) state actors and (2) practitioners. Under (1) state actors, policy makers, donors and resource persons who make policies or have influence on policy making are considered. Under (2) practitioners; educators (teacher trainers, teachers and teacher trainees), learners (formal school students and non-formal students such as youth leaders), and Civil Society Organizations (NGOs and religious leaders), who are engaged in social cohesion and peace building are covered. These respondents belong to different ethnic groups and religions in Sri Lanka.

Table 1: Research Participants

(1) State actors	(2) Practitioners	
Policy makers Donors Resource persons	Educators	Teacher trainers Teachers Teacher trainees
	Learners	Formal students Youth leaders
	Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	NGOs Religious leaders

4.4 Institutions Covered

Government institutions which are obliged to implement recommendations of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace and CSOs which are conducting social cohesion and peace education programmes are concerned in this research. Under government institutions;   Ministry of Education (MoE), the National Institute of Education (NIE), the National Colleges of Education (NCoE), Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) and five government schools are covered.

The MoE is responsible for general education, and teacher education in Sri Lanka.   The   National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace is centered in the Peace Education and Reconciliation Unit (PERU) of the MoE. The German Development Cooperation (GIZ), the donor agency considered in this research operated under the Planning & Performance Review Division of the MoE with the vision to provide support for peacebuilding through education.

The NIE   is responsible for teacher training, curriculum development, educational management and research. The NCoE's are teacher training colleges, and responsible in implementing social cohesion and peace programmes for teacher trainees under the recommendations of the National Policy. The ONUR was set up in 2015,   with the commitment to achieve national unity and reconciliation. Government schools are the main providers of social cohesion and peace programmes and citizenship education under the formal-education system.

In this research, two NGOs, the Sarvodaya   Shramadana Movement and the National Peace Council, which are conducting social cohesion and peace education programmes for non-formal learners are considered.

4.5 Areas Covered

Sri Lanka is divided into nine provinces: Northern, North Western, North Central, Eastern, Western, Central, Southern, Uva and Sabaragamuwa. In this research five provinces were covered: Northern, Eastern, Western, Central and Uva provinces. Northern Province   predominates by Tamil-Hindus, Eastern Province has a   significant proportion of Tamil-Hindus in addition to the majority Muslims, Western, Central and Uva Provinces are multicultural, but predominates by the majority Sinhala-Buddhists.

In figure 3, star marks depict the provinces covered in this research.

Figure 3: Provinces of Sri Lanka
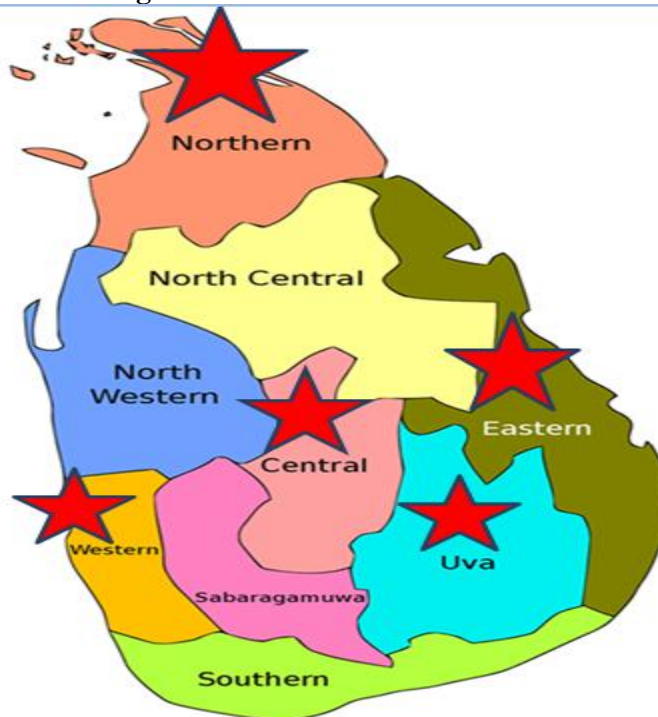
5 Data Analysis: Perceptions of Respondents   on Social Cohesion and Peace

Two questions were asked from respondents: (1) What is social cohesion and peace? (2) Do people in Sri Lanka live in cohesion and peace? to know about their perceptions.

5.1 What is Social Cohesion and Peace?

This question was asked from all research respondents; "**state actors" and "practitioners"** to know their general perceptions about social cohesion and peace.

Answers to the first question,   what is social cohesion and peace?" are coded under 14 categories in line with the frequency of answers: (1) togetherness (2) trouble-free environment (3) divisionlessness (4) communication (5) freedom (6) happiness (7) equality (8) values (9) inner peace (10) environment (11) negative peace (12) development (13) attitudes and (14) recognition.

Then, coded categories (perceptions) are compared with the objectives of the National Policy on Social Cohesion and Peace Education (2008) and its' Review Report (2016).

Table 2: Comparison of Categorized Perceptions with Policy Objectives

No	Categories Coded (according to perceptions of respondents)	Total (No of persons mentioned this category)	Compatibility with the objectives of the National Policy (2008) and its Review Report (2016)
1	Togetherness	135	Multicultural society
2	Trouble-free environment	53	Conflict transformation
3	Divisionlessness	42	Respect diversity
4	Communication	40	Communication, Understanding, listening
5	Freedom	33	Democratic citizen
6	Happiness	31	Has a peaceful and sustainable lifestyle
7	Equality	27	Attempting greater equality and equity
8	Values	25	Civic virtues and values (e.g. humanity, respect and empathy)
9	Inner peace	13	Inner peace
10	Environment	7	Environmental friendly
11	Negative peace	6	-
12	Development	6	Participate in the development of world, vocational education (to develop livelihoods in disadvantaged areas)
13	Attitudes	5	-
14	Recognition	4	Recognition of different groups through history education

Answers of respondents to this question match almost all objectives of the National Policy. Most frequented answers to this question are, (1) togetherness, (2) trouble-free environment, (3) divisionlessness and (4) communication. Respondents express **(1) togetherness** in different terms such as unity, oneness, harmony and social cohesion, and talks about the need of a common Sri Lankan identity. The National Policy recognizes **(1) togetherness** as a building of a **multicultural society**.

Under **(2) trouble-free environment** respondents point out wide array of present and long-continuing social, economic and political problems including root causes of the internal conflict of Sri Lanka. The National Policy proposes **conflict transformation** to overcome these problems. **(3) Divisionlessness** talks about a society free from mainly ethnic and religious divisions, in addition to language, cultural, caste, and class divisions. The National Policy recognizes this category as **respecting cultural diversity and cultural pluralism**. Under **(4) communication**, respondents stress the need of inter-cultural dialogue and the National policy proposes **learning each-others' languages and integration activities** for different groups as a solution for communication gaps. In addition to above high frequency categories, all other categories are also having a compatibility with the objectives of the National Policy as depicted in table 2. Respondents talks about two additional categories, (11) negative peace and (13) attitudes which are not mentioned in the National Policy.

5.2 Do People in Sri Lanka live in Cohesion and Peace?

This question was asked from all groups under **"practitioners"** category to know whether they think that social cohesion and peace practically exist in Sri Lanka. Respondents' answers to this question depict their real life situations and the real condition of Sri Lanka. Then, these answers, compared with their perceptions on social cohesion and peace mentioned in table (1) under 14 categories.

In this section, participants mentioned 11 categories: (1) trouble-free environment, (2) freedom, (3) togetherness, (4) divisionlessness, (5) negative peace, (6) values, (7) communication, (8) equality, (9) inner peace, (10) happiness and (11) recognition. These answers are depicted in Table 3 based on frequencies. As respondents expressed these categories in "positive" and "negative" terms, Table 3 positions number of participants, who gave positive answers under 'yes' and negative answers under 'no'.

Table 3: Perceptions of Participants about Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka

Number	Categories coded (according to perceptions of respondents)	Total (of persons mentioned this category)	Nature of answers	
			Yes	No
1	Trouble-free environment	99	10	89
2	Freedom	60	54	6
3	Togetherness	57	41	16
4	Divisionlessness	28	12	16
5	Negative peace	24	23	1
6	Values	18	8	10
7	Communication	14	6	8
8	Equality	14	6	8
9	Inner peace	10	-	10
10	Happiness	7	7	-
11	Recognition	3	-	3

High frequency answers given under this question are; (1) Trouble free environment (2) freedom and (3) togetherness. More respondents agree that there is social cohesion and peace or some kind of peace in Sri Lanka. To justify this answer they put forward **(2) freedom and (3) togetherness.** The highest number of participants assume that there is no **(1) trouble free environment** in Sri Lanka. They express many social, economic and political problems that hinder social cohesion and peace process in Sri Lanka. Respondents present all other categories in negative sense indicating the non-existence or low level of existence of these categories in Sri Lanka.

6 Conclusions

Compatibility of perceptions of respondents on social cohesion and peace with all objectives of the National Policy indicates that, the message which the National Policy is willing to give has successfully spread in to the society. This shows that respondents have developed the "conscientization" of the relevant pedagogy, through the initiatives of the National Policy.

Respondents express high expectations on social cohesion and peace, not only building just a peaceful society without direct violence which Johan Galtung(Galtung in Webel and Galtung, 2007) mentions as negative peace, but many favorable conditions for positive peace including social justice. But, respondents express the non-existence of such favorable conditions, when it comes to the pragmatic level. This indicates that although respondents are willing to accept social cohesion and peace initiatives, there is no favourable condition in the country to implement related activities. The non-existence of factors conducive to achieve positive peace indicates the less progress of initiatives taken under the recommendations of the National Policy so far.

7 References

Balasooriya, A. S. (2001). Learning the Way of Peace: A Teachers' Guide to Peace Education. New Delhi: UNESCO.

Bush, K.D., &Saltarelli, D. (2000).The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children. Florence: Innocenti Research Center.

Cardozo, T.A.L. (2006),The State of Peace Education in Sri Lanka: in Peace or in Pieces.[Online] Available:www.s3.amazonaws.com/.../doc_1_63_Thesis_Sri_Lanka

Davies, L. (2015),The Politics of Peace Education in Post-Conflict Countries. [Online] Available:www.soc.kuleuven.be/crpd/files/.../working-paper-davies

Fountain, S. (1999),Peace Education in UNICEF. [Online] Available: https://www.unicef.org/education/files/PeaceEducation.pdf

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London: Penguin Books.

Hanh, T.N. (1987). Being Peace. California: Parallax Press.

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (2014),Peace Education in the Classroom: Creating Effective Peace Education Programs. [Online] Available: www.researchgate.net

Ministry of Education.(2008). National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (ESCP).Battaramulle: Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit.

Ministry of Education.(2016). Review of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace. Colombo: Ministry of Education

Office for National Unity and Reconciliation.(2017). National policy on Reconciliation and Coexistence Sri Lanka. Colombo: Department of Government Printing.

Perera, S. (2011),Reflections on Issues of Language in Sri Lanka: Power, Exclusion and Inclusion.[Online] Available:www.langdevconferences.org/...ColomboSriLanka/05-Languagean

Perera, S. (2001),The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: A Historical and Sociopolitical Outline.[Online] Available:http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/727811468302711738/The-ethnic-conflict-in-Sri-Lanka-a-historical-and-sociopolitical-outline

The EURED Teacher Training Programme (2002),Design for a European Peace Education course.[Online] Available:www.doku.cac.

UNESCO. (2015), Education for peace: Promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in Africa through education for peace and conflict prevention. [Online] Available:www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/.../233601e.pdf

Webel, C., &Galtung, J. (2007).Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies. Abingdon: Routledge