Article

Measuring the Level of Intercultural Competence (IC) among Muslim Religious Leaders in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: As far as the religious leaders are influential in Sri Lankan society, their intercultural competence (IC) level matters for social harmony in the country. The existing literature found a lack of IC among religious leaders and highlighted their damaging role in a long history of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. Referring to the 2019 easter attack, some social activists questioned the level of IC of Muslim religious leaders and the relevance of madrasa education. This research, therefore, evaluates the level of IC among the graduates of Sri Lankan madrasas. For this purpose, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was adopted. This study used a mixed method of data collection. A quantitative research instrument was administered among 26 madrasa alumni, and only 101 Muslim religious leaders responded. Out of the total participants, 72 (71.3%) were males and 29 (28.7%) were females. In the qualitative approach, 06 Madrasa principles accepted the invitation to the interview. They shared information about the curriculum, madrasa environment, institution policy, and their experience in dealing with issues of IC. This research found 'minimization level or third level of IC in DMIS among all participants.' A total of 65% of participants obtained acceptance and adaptation levels of IC. Since these madrasas have no other means except Islamic religious courses to develop this level of IC, researchers concluded that the religious education in Sri Lankan madrasas does not oppose multiculturalism. Furthermore, Islamic religious education can potentially develop IC among Muslim religious leaders. Since this research was conducted among Muslim religious leaders who graduated more than ten years ago, research is needed to ensure the current situation.

Keywords: intercultural competence; madrasa education in Sri Lanka; the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS); religious education; Sri Lankan muslims

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1. Introduction

Sri Lanka is a multicultural country. Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and Burghers are the central ethnic communities in the country. Four major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, are predominant among Sri Lankans. Buddhists are the majority, representing 70.1%, Hindus 12.6%, Muslims 9.7%, and Christians 7.6% of the country's total population (Population Census and Demography Division 2015, p. 37).

Sri Lanka has practiced free education since1938 (Karunathilake 2019, p. 3). Hence, it has the highest literacy rate of 92% in South Asia (Alawattegama 2020). However, the schools are segregated in Sri Lanka based on religious and linguistic identities; out of 10,165 schools, 75% of schools are Buddhist schools, and they use the Sinhala language as the medium of instruction, whereas 25% of schools (14.5% of Hindu and 10.5% of Muslim) schools use Tamil as a medium of instruction (Statistics Branch of Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka 2020, p. 5).

Since religion is an inevitable aspect of Sri Lankan society, the national education system gives a prominent place to religious education. Hence, the students from primary to upper secondary levels learn their religion for 03 periods at least per week. Furthermore, religious education is compulsory at the ordinary level (Brintha et al. 2018). The National Institute of Education (NIE) regulates religious education in schools (Gamage 2019; Wijedasa 2019).

Apart from teaching religion as a subject in school, the education to produce religious leaders operates in the country across religious communities. For example, the Buddhist monastic education 'Privina', Hindu monastic education 'Ashram', Muslim religious education 'Madrasa', and Christian religious Education 'seminary', are famous among respective religious communities. Although this religious education operates parallel to the conventional education system, no centralized regulatory system exists to monitor religious education except for Buddhist monasteries.

The NIE regulates Buddhist monastic Education through Privinas. According to Keerthirathne (2020), Privena education consists of three levels: (i) Primary level (Mulikapirivena) similar to Ordinary Level, (ii) Upper secondary level (Mahapirivena) similar to the Advanced Level, and (iii) University Level (Vidyayathana). A total of 801 Mulikapirivena and Mahapirivena privinas operate in the country (Statistics Branch of Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka 2020, p. 112).

Unlike Buddhist monastic education, the Kovils community manages Hindu Ashrams (Hindu Aranery School) to produce Kurukkal, whereas churches manage Christian seminaries. The local mosque community or individuals manage madrasa education (Wijedasa 2019). It shows that religious leaders, through Hindu Ashrams, Christian seminaries, or Madrasa, are produced for domestic needs.

Although the government of Sri Lanka has given importance to religious education in conventional systems, there is hardly any opportunity for students from one religion to learn about others' religions and their cultures through curriculum or environment. Hence, the government took many intercultural and inter-religious initiatives through co-curricular activities (Ramzy and Ashaari 2018). However, these efforts did not bring the expected outcomes since the co-curricular activities failed to attract the school administration and teachers (Ramzy and Ashaari 2018). Therefore, Sri Lankans are religious in terms of their religion; however, their intercultural competence is low (Silva 2019). Wedikandage's (2014) study on multiculturalism based on secondary school also found similar results.

This situation is worse among students in the traditional religious education system compared to the conventional school system. Since each religious community has its system to produce religious leaders, the students in these religious educations are segregated and have no opportunity to interact with others (Karunathilake 2019, p. 22). They have no access to learn others' religions or culture. Therefore, a lack of intercultural competence among religious leaders is observed in the country (Keenan 2021).

As a result, the religious leaders who were supposed to play a vital role in peace (UN 2017) and social harmony (UNICEF 2020) instigated violence and promoted the anti-minority campaign in many parts of the world. Kishi (2018) indicated that more than 27% of the world population experienced violence motivated by religion (PEW 2021, p. 5). Gorur and Gregory (2021) also indicated the increasing trend of violence based on religion (p. 2).

The active role of religious leaders in instigating violence is evident in Asian and African countries. Adamczyk and LaFree (2019) explained the connection between religious leaders and African political violence. Basedau and Koos (2015) studied the role of religious leaders in violence and conflict in Sudan, involving 102 religious leaders. There were 36 active stat-based conflicts in Asia during 2010–2020 (Burke 2021, p. 7). Many of these conflicts were related to polarizing politics associated with Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu radicalism (Burke 2021, p. 6). Suntana and Tresnawaty (2021) explained this religious violence in Asia as a psychological symptom of a society that faces a social situation connected to a power struggle and economic domination. However, Burke (2021) found

the rise of majoritarian movements that fear their privileged position from the minorities, mainly religious, ethnic, and sexual challenges (p. 11).

Interestingly, the Asian experience of religious violence highlighted the influence of external elements as a reason for conflict. In contrast, the African experience of religious violence underlined personal determinations as reasons for violence rather than external influences. For instance, Basedau and Koos (2015) found an active role of religious leaders in conflict not because of internal competition, group differences, and social deprivations, as highlighted in the research, but rather personal determinants.

Whatever the reason, religious leaders played a significant role in promoting violence against other communities in Asian countries. It is quite apparent in Sri Lanka (Gunasingham 2018; Gunaratna 2021). Moreover, they were on the frontline of racial campaigns and encouraged people to think and act based on emotional and racial standards rather than moral values and reason (Wijedasa 2019).

IC among Muslim Religious Leaders

A lack of IC among Muslim religious leaders is observed (Razick et al. 2015). As a result, the media and some research accused them of bringing foreign culture into Sri Lanka (Wijedasa 2019; Hanifa 2021). After the 2019 easter attack, this accusation reached its peak (Sattar and Arriola 2020). This is because it was believed that the easter attack that consisted of six simultaneous suicide bomb blasts on 21 April 2019, Easter Sunday, in three churches and three tourist hotels, killing 269 innocent people, was carried out by Muslim extremists under the leadership of Zahran Hashim, although the actual involvement remainsunclear (Constable and Perara 2019).

From this basis, some political analysts questioned the existence of Madrasa in Sri Lanka (Jayasuriya 2021; Yehiya 2019; Lasseter and Shri 2019). This research, therefore, investigates intercultural competence among Muslim religious leaders who have completed Islamic religious education in a Madrasa in Sri Lanka.

2. Background of Study

Intercultural competence (IC) is a necessary ability developed through knowledge and skills (Garrote and Aguero 2016). Teaching young people to respect each other and prepare for a multicultural world has been given various names. These include multicultural education, antiracist education, religious education, human rights education, and intercultural education. However, intercultural education has become popular in Europe (McKenna 2005).

There is a discussion among scholars about whether intercultural education and multicultural education are the same or different. Some of them agreed to use both of these terms interchangeably (McKenna 2005). However, some others find it different. For instance, referring to B. Van Driel (2004, p. 3), McKenna (2005) said that intercultural education has a broader scope than multicultural or antiracist education. Multicultural education focuses on teaching minority individuals about their own culture or the majority about other's cultures, whereas intercultural education focuses on interaction with others regardless of majority or minority (McKenna 2005). Hence, intercultural education is not only about knowledge of others and their culture but also interactive and cooperative skills (McKenna 2005).

Intercultural competence (IC) is an ability to function effectively across cultures and religions, and think and act appropriately in a different context (Leung et al. 2014). In addition, it is an ability to communicate with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Leung et al. 2014). Hence, IC is the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that make a person adopt a different environment and context. However, since the environment and context are constantly changing, and the reaction to this change differs from one to another, it is difficult to define what IC is. For this reason, many definitions of IC exist, yet no consensus on what constitutes IC does (Deardorff 2006).

After studying many descriptions, Deardorff (2009) defines IC as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes". According to this definition, IC means effective and appropriate communication in a multicultural context. Effective communication means exchanging ideas, thoughts, opinions, and views clearly and convincingly, whereas appropriate communication means consistent words and body language, avoiding destruction. Fantini (2009) elaborated on this further and said, "Effectiveness relates to one's performance in the contact language and or culture while appropriateness is determined by how those in the target culture perceive one's performance" (Fantini 2009). Hence, intercultural competence is the ability to express one's view on some issues without destruction and to interact with people fitting to specific contexts and environments.

2.1. Intercultural Competence through Religious Education

Although the religious diversity aspect in intercultural education was a matter of discussion in the West for a long time, all states in Europe responded to diversity in different ways (Jackson 2014, p. 14). The history, language, linguistic skills, and teacher training dominated intercultural discussion (McKenna 2005). Since religion was considered by many as a private matter until 2002 (Jackson 2014, p. 14), it did not get a prominent place in IC before 1990 (McKenna 2005). According to McKenna (2005), negligence of religion in IC in the West has two levels: first, religious diversity has been neglected as an aspect of cultural diversity; second, the suspicion about the role of religious education in addressing cultural diversity. However, gradually, religion became a part of the academic discussion with the increment of religion's influences on the public sphere (Jackson 2014, p. 17).

Referring to Jackson (1997), McKenna (2005) emphasized religious knowledge's importance in his explanation of constructive criticism. Consequently, there were efforts to improve students' religious knowledge as part of the curriculum. In addition, the discussion on the role of religion in developing IC in association with human rights education and citizenship education was popular among academicians during the year 2000 (McKenna 2005).

Nevertheless, the aspect of religion was included in intercultural education in 2002 with the launching of a project called "intercultural education and the challenge of religious diversity and dialogue in Europe" by the Council of Europe (Jackson 2014, p. 16). In 2007, a reference book on the religious dimension of intercultural education was published (Jackson 2014, p. 17). The Council of Europe issued a white paper on intercultural dialogue—Living Together as Equals in Dignity in 2008 (Jackson 2014, p. 15). The Council of Europe gathered the representative of European religious leaders, institutional partners, and humanist organizations in the same year to discuss educational issues concerning religions, and it continued as an annual programme (Jackson 2014, p. 15). As an outcome of the Council of Europe's project mentioned earlier, the Committee of Ministers (foreign ministers of all 47 member countries) recognized the aspect of religion in intercultural education and endorsed the recommendation in 2008 (Jackson 2014, p. 17). However, developing IC through religious education became popular after the 9/11 attack (McKenna 2005).

In recent times, religious education has become an inevitable factor in education since its influence not only in politics but also in the public sphere. Hannam (2019), for instance, criticized the conceptualization of religious education in education based on political and human rights concerns (p. 2). Instead, he demands a serious engagement of religion in education as it has become an important element to define the existence of human beings on earth. Referring to Hannah Arendt's (1998, 2006) understanding of the 'public sphere', Hannam (2019) explains that religion is a necessary aspect of human life, and it should be included in education not as a bill of rights or international declaration since it has become practical in the public sphere and has started to give meaning to 'man's' existence (Hannam 2019, p. 3). This shows the internalization of religion and its influence in intercultural education.

Understanding IC through religious education has been developed based on the primary query about the central issue of diversity. Initially, it was believed that the central issues of diversity were the individual perception of race and the content of cultural traditions, and religious education, therefore focusing on creating positive attitudes towards Asian and black religious communities (Jackson 1995). However, the "structure of power" was understood as the crucial issue of diversity by antiracist ideologists in the 1980s. Hence, antiracists argued for a change of 'power structure' (Jackson 1995). Although this argument is not directly related to religious education, it is indirectly influential through the way of representing and interpreting religious and cultural materials to address the power structure (Jackson 1995). Therefore, the role of religious education in intercultural education was understood in a variety of ways based on the perception of diversity. However, Jackson's (1995) explanation of the role of religion in intercultural education provides an overall perception and aim to religious education. He said that religious education is "to change negative attitudes towards the religions and cultures -of Britain's new- citizens through knowledge and understanding, sometimes enhanced by personal acquaintance" (Jackson 1995). Hence, religious education in intercultural education, for him, is a way of changing the perception and attitudes of others by educating one's own religion or belief as well as others.

Thus, through religious education, IC is learning religion and culture to be religious and broadminded to accept others (Khojir et al. 2021). Religious-based intercultural learning expects to foster creativity, reasoning ability, curiosity, the ability to find new possibilities, openness, democracy, and tolerance (Kosenkova et al. 2021). From the aspect of developing attitudes and communication, IC, through religious education, aims to adopt proper manner and behaviour in a multicultural situation while maintaining one's own religious and cultural preferences. Hence, a person's religiosity should drive him or her to promote positive characteristics such as being open-minded and tolerant of different perspectives (Ilie 2019).

There are several objectives for IC through religious education. Liddicoat et al. (2003) have found four that are significant; active construction, active participation, networking, and interaction. Active construction means preparing students to construct religious and cultural knowledge. Active participation converses, preparing students to search for information about different religions and cultures by various methods such as reading, dialogue, and observation. Networking prepares students to improve their network and make social relationships by analyzing the information. Finally, developing the ability of students to interact with people in a different context (Liddicoat et al. 2003). Hence, religion not only became the central point of discussion on intercultural education, but religious education was also suited as an essential way of developing IC in the West.

2.2. The Role of Religious Leaders Is Crucial in Developing IC

There are many ways to develop IC. The study-abroad programme, multicultural classroom, internationalization of curricula, and service-learning are widespread methodologies to develop IC (Prieto-Flores et al. 2016). Although religious education is not a popular method in the West until recently (Raveri et al. 2013), it is a primary method for developing IC in Asian countries (Nadeem et al. 2017). Moreover, the influence of religious education on intercultural education increased in Asian countries to the extent of expressing that developing IC is impossible by ignoring religious education, particularly in Sri Lanka.

Religion is a significant dimension of cultural diversity. Intercultural competence, therefore, is impossible without proper consideration of religion. Gonzalez (2015) explained this aspect from inside and outside a religious community. The religious culture, such as garments, prayer objects, incense, place of worship, and sacred texts, are recognized by outsiders for their beauty and functionality. However, these objects are sacred to the religious community, with specific rules to handle them. Disrespect of these objects or ignoring the rules to be handled may result in violence (Gonzalez 2015, p. 728). The Buddhists' response to the destruction of Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan in 2001 (Crossette

2001) and the Muslims' response to the prophet Mohammad cartoon in Danish Paper (Klausen 2009) are good examples to support this argument. It shows that intercultural competence is impossible without understanding the influence of religion on culture.

Functionalists and conflict sociologists have confirmed religion's positive role in shaping people's behaviour in society (Ramzy et al. 2021). Since religion shapes individual perceptions and values that determine attitudes and behaviour, no cultural competence is possible without addressing the role of religion in human life. Moreover, as intercultural competence development relies on respecting others, appreciating others' beliefs, perceptions, and worldview is essential.

Although the essence of religion is peace and its role in promoting order in human thoughts and actions is beneficial to individuals and society, it can be used both positively and negatively; it can be used as a source of peace and harmony or as the basis of violence and radicalism (Islam 2020). Therefore, religion's positive or negative role depends on the religious leaders who are influential in specific contexts and conditions (Basedau et al. 2018). The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect further elaborated that religious leaders are influential in societies. They can use their position to incite violence against others, spread messages of hatred and hostility, or prevent violence by spreading the message of peace (UN 2017).

Hence, the role of religious leaders is crucial in developing IC, and religious education is a successful method to develop IC when the level of IC of religious leaders is high. Unfortunately, the literature found a lack of IC among religious leaders in Sri Lanka. Notably, the Muslim religious leaders and religious institutions were accused of having a low level of IC after the 2019 easter attack. Therefore, this research is interested in evaluating the IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka.

3. Method

This research was conducted with a mixed methodology consisting of quantitative and qualitative approaches. A mixed method of research in IC has been used widely in recent years (Ameli and Molaei 2012). Fuller (2007) also used this method to assess the IC among theological students. Straffon (2003) studied the intercultural sensitivity of international high school students using the mixed method. Hence, this research also used a mixed method to collect the data to understand better Muslim religious leaders' IC and their perception of others, ideas, attitudes, and experiences concerning teaching and learning. The qualitative method was primarily used in this research to understand how far the curriculum of Madrasas and the madrasa environments help develop IC in their students. Hence, a questionnaire was administered among graduates of Madrasa while the curriculum and other facilities were studied based on qualitative interviews.

3.1. Strategy of the Study

This section discusses the theoretical aspects of this research to evaluate the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka. There are many models to evaluate IC. The Intercultural Interlocutor Competence of Fantini (1995), the Intercultural Competence of Byram (1997), Intercultural Maturity of King and Baxter Magolda (2005), the U Curve Hypothesis model of Lysgaard's (1955), the extended W Model of Acculturation and Re-acculturation of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) of Bennett, are some of these models. These models help to promote and to evaluate a certain degree of IC.

However, this research adopted Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett 2004). Since this study focused on the minimum level of cultural competence of Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka, the variation in perception and behaviour is essential. Furthermore, since the DMIS model captures simple changes in people's behavior without considering their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Bennett 2004), this research DMIS model will evaluate the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) has been developed based on cognitive psychology and constructivism. Bennett, in this model, predicted a person's way of understanding, feeling about, and responding to a different culture (Bennett 2004). This prediction has been presented in stages, moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism (Bennett 2004). Hence, the DMIS includes two main categories: ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism.

The DMIS model explains that changing a person's behavior moves from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism in six stages. The most ethnocentric stage in DMIS is the Denial of Cultural Diversity, and Integration is the final stage of ethnorelativism. The second stage in DMIS is Defense Against Cultural Differences, and the Minimization is the third or middle of the continuum. According to Bennett (2004), this is crucial since the transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism begins in this stage. The Acceptance stage follows this. Finally, the heart of ethnorelativism is Adaptation (Bennett 2004).

According to Figure 1, an individual with an ethnocentric orientation avoids cultural differences by denying their existence by raising defenses against them or minimizing their importance. Usually, this person avoids other cultures based on his or her belief that his or her culture, religion, or ethnic group is the best and superior to all other groups. Hence, Bennett (2004) predicted three possible stages in this process: Denial, Defense, and Minimization. In the Denial stage, the person sees his or her culture or religion as the only objective. This worldview makes the person follow the beliefs, behaviours, and values of that culture or religion without questioning them (Bennett 2004). However, according to Bennett (2004), this experience creates undifferentiated others, such as 'foreigners' or 'minority' (Bennett 2004).

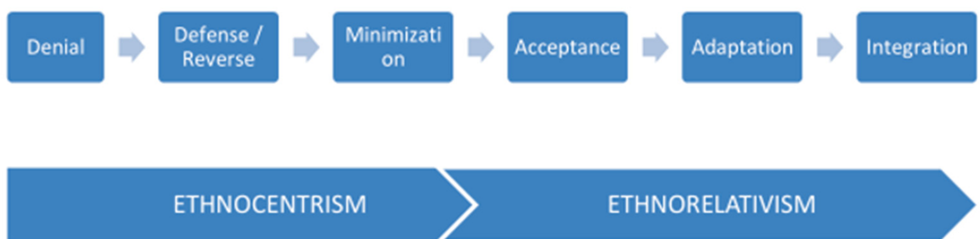

Figure 1. The stage of moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism is based on DMIS Model.

The second stage of DMIS is Defense. In this stage, an individual thinks that his or her culture is the best or most evolved form of civilization. In the view of Bennett (2004), people in this stage are stereotypical and seriously feel threatened by other cultures. In the Defense stage, the defensive strategies of other cultures make the people of dominant cultures attack their values. For example, they may complain that the minorities are taking our job or that the number of minorities is increasing (Bennett 2004). Hence, a difference in culture and religion for a person in this stage is disruptive and intimidating (Kruse et al. 2014).

In the minimization stage, a person is still ethnocentric, but see similarities among cultures and religions. In this stage, the threat from other cultures will be minimized, and a person starts to feel that the cultural differences are not significant compared to the similarities among these cultures (Bennett 2004). The experience of finding similarities sometimes goes beyond the culture to religious, economic, political, and philosophical concepts (Bennett 2004). For example, the individuals in this stage might feel that everyone in this world is a child of God (Bennett 2004). Bennett (2004) explains this stage with an example of a 'melting pot that accepts others' cultures.

Ethno-relative emphasizes the way of seeking cultural differences. In other words, it is the process of accepting others on the belief that one's culture or religion is one of many different cultures and religions. It happens by accepting the importance of other cultures, adapting others' perspectives, or integrating the whole concept to define his or her identity. This includes Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration.

An individual in stage four, Acceptance, views his culture and religion as just one of the many cultures in the world. People in this stage experience others as human beings, although they are different in culture (Bennett 2004). The individuals in this stage have positive attitudes towards other cultures without having the ability to experience the other culture (Bennett 2004). For instance, the person in this stage will see the behaviour of a corrupted politician as a complex human being whose behaviour is good in his ethnic context and evil in the context of the current world (Bennett 2004).

In stage five, Adaptation, a person can see things from another's perspective or can engage with others in empathy (Bennett 2004). The shift from one's frame of reference to another. According to Bennett (2004), this is not just a cognitive level but also includes effects and behaviors. Hence, this person changes his or her behaviours to be appreciated (Bennett 2004).

Integration is the sixth stage of DMIS. The individuals in this stage quickly move between cultures and adjust naturally to unique situations and expectations (Kruse et al. 2014). For Bennett (2004), it is cultural marginality. In this stage, the individuals construct their identities at the margins of two or more cultures and are central to none (Bennett 2004). This will happen through "two forms: (a) an encapsulated form, where the separation from culture is experienced as alienation; and (b) a constructive form, in which movements in and out of cultures are a necessary and positive part of one's identity" (Bennett 2004).

3.2. The Sample

This study follows a mixed method of exploratory research. First, quantitative research instruments were used to measure the intercultural competence level of Muslim religious leaders. A qualitative interview was used to get the perception among principals of selected Madrasa. The ultimate aim of this study was to measure the intercultural competence level among Muslim religious leaders. The Bennett (2004) framework of a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) was used as the theoretical framework for the study.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected based on their completion of religious education in a Sri Lankan Madrasa. Although this study did not consider the age limit, most respondents were below 40 years. Since this research was not limited to gender, male and female religious leaders responded to the questionnaire. The respondents were divided into two categories. The first category was the religious leaders among the Sri Lankan Muslim community. This category was selected from Alumni of 25 leading Muslim religious institutions in Sri Lanka. The second category was the head of institutions in Sri Lanka.

Information about the curriculum and the madrasa environment in association with IC was gathered from the qualitative interviews. An intensive method was used to collect data using semi-structured questions. The qualitative questionnaire consisted of seven questions constructed based on DMIS. Each interview was conducted online using the WhatsApp app for around 20–25 min. The participants were selected based on the head of the Madrasa, who has the authority to provide information about the curriculum and madrasa environment as well as the institutions' policy. Hence, six Madrasa principles accepted the invitation and shared information about the curriculum, madrasa environment, institution policy, and their experience in dealing with issues of IC. Unlike quantitative questionnaires that allowed the participants to share their experiences on interactions with others, the qualitative questions in this research allowed them to describe issues related to curriculum, teacher training, and institution policies on diversity while explaining their perspectives on interactions with others. Although many madrasas do not have a course on other religions and cultures, most discuss the rights of others and their other culture and the responsibility of Muslims towards others through courses related to the Quranic and Hadith sciences. This made the researchers probe questions such as, 'Could you explain it

more?' and 'Can you please explain it with an example?' to get detailed information or clarify specific experiences (See Table 1).

Table 1. Participants in qualitative data collection.

No.	Designation	ID	Madrasa	Gender	Province
1	Principal	P_1	Boys	Male	Western
2	Principal	P_2	Girls	Male	Sabragumuwa
3	Principal	P_3	Boys	Male	North Western
4	Principal	P_4	Girls	Male	Western
5	Principal	P_5	Girls	Male	Central
6	Principal	P_6	Boys	Male	Eastern

3.3. The Instruments and Techniques Used in This Study

A survey instrument prepared based on intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett 2004) was implemented in this research. The DMIS model represents a change of a person from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism based on six stages, namely: (i) Denial, (ii) Defense, (iii) Minimization, (iv) Acceptance, (v) Adaptation, and (vi) Integration, (Bennett 2004). The five-point Likert scale questionnaire was submitted to four experts for content validation to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument adopted in this research. The content validity of research instruments can be determined using the viewpoints of the panel of experts (Zamanzadeh et al. 2014, p. 167). Accordingly, the item level content validation index (I-CVI) was calculated with responses received from two experts. The overall I-CVI reached 0.94, which is higher than the minimum required I-CVI value of 0.80 for two experts, as stated by Davis (1992). The I-CVI value was also calculated for each segment of the questionnaire individually. The results show a higher grade of reliability in the domain of study: Denial—0.83; Defense—1.0; Minimization—1.0; Acceptance—1.0; Integration—1.0; and, Adaptation—0.83. The ICVI value of each segment indicates the reliability and validity of the contents of the questionnaire subject to the domain of the research and each component of the research questions.

Various methods guaranteed the study's trustworthiness for the qualitative part, such as multiple source data collection, individual interviews transcript, participant's demographic data, interviewer's response to the questionnaire, and member check with the experts.

3.4. Analysis of Data

The data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.0 statistical analysis software. In addition, the qualitative questionnaire responses were analyzed by coding the Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained.

Data triangulation is vital to understanding the live experience in qualitative data collection (Patton 1999). Therefore, this research used a different data collection method for the same purpose. In addition to the interview, the researcher received the audio recording and document analysis (Patton 1999). The researchers sent the interview questions along with a letter of consent before the interview. The participants were requested to send the consent first through WhatsApp or email and to give a proper time to contact them. This helped ensure their freedom to express their opinions (McMullin 2021). In addition, the participants have been assured confidentiality and data protection (Blaxter et al. 2001, p. 5).

Semi-structured questions were used to collect the data from six Madrasa principles (Small 2011). The participants in this data collection were selected based on place, the number of students, and gender. Despite transcribing data as the qualitative approach's primary step (Davidson 2009), the researcher transcribed all interviews. The drafted interviews were checked with the audio recordings to ensure the data's authenticity before coding and analyzing (Sutton and Austin 2015; McMullin 2021). Using the deductive coding method, the data was coded based on the Gibbs model (2007) using the deductive coding method (Christians and Carey 1989). Researchers developed themes after reading

the coded data several times (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove 2019). Since this research explores the live experience of Madrasa principles, systematic data analysis was used (Moustaka 1994). This is because the systematic data analysis allows researchers to develop an objective essence through subjective experiences (Moustaka 1994, p. 22).

4. Result

4.1. Sample

The demographic details of the 101 respondents (n = 101) representing 26 Madrasas in Sri Lanka are presented as follows. Out of the total participants, 72 (71.3%) were males and 29 (28.7%) were females. Among the respondents, 41 (40.6%) fall into the age category of 30 to 40 years, and 67 (66.3%) are below 50. The age group indicates the highest number of participants were below 50 years of age among the 75 who expressed their age. Participants from all nine provinces of Sri Lanka are included in the study. However, a double-digit percentage is represented in the provinces where Muslims predominantly live such as Central province—13 (12.9%); Eastern province—16 (15.8%); Northwestern province—17 (16.8%); Sabragamuwa province—23 (22.8%); and Western province—20 (19.8%). Regarding the academic qualification of the participants, 19 (18.8%) participants have only completed the Madrasa education, whereas 15 (14.9%) have completed an additional higher diploma certificate. A total of 43 participants were degree holders (42.6%), whereas 20 (19.8%) held master's degree certificates, and 3 (3%) of them were Ph.D. holders, out of the 100 respondents. A total of 65.4% of the respondents in this study hold a basic university degree in addition to their certificate from Sri Lanka Muslim religious Madrasa.

4.2. Findings

The first stage in the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity is Denial. The questionnaire contains six questions representing this stage. Table 2 shows the summary of the statistical score for the Denial stage. The overall mean score of 2.131 (SD = 0.758) indicates that the selected participants disagree with the statements of Denial; individual participants presumably agree on the existence of other cultures in Sri Lanka.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of perception of the denial stage.

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S1Q1	101	1	5	335	3.32	1.581
S1Q2	100	1	5	132	1.32	0.777
S1Q3	100	1	5	139	1.39	0.723
S1Q4	100	1	3	119	1.19	0.486
S1Q5	99	1	5	208	2.10	1.374
S1Q6	97	1	5	327	3.37	1.563
Denial	101	1.00	5.00	215.20	2.1307	0.75802
Valid N (listwise)	96					

The Defense stage statistical summary is given in Table 3; three statements represent the Defense stage. Defense refers to the superiority of one's own culture while denigrating the other cultures. The overall mean score was 3.007 (SD = 0.883). This indicates that Muslim religious leaders are neutral when defending their cultures and against threats from other cultures in Sri Lanka. Statement number nine in the questionnaire, 'when I interact with another faith person, it makes me realize how much better the Muslim culture is', scored the highest mean value of 4.24 compared with the other two statements. This indicates the perception of superiority of their own culture among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of perception of Defense stage.

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S2Q7	100	1	5	273	2.73	1.510
S2Q8	100	1	5	205	2.05	1.167
S2Q9	100	1	5	424	4.24	1.182
Defense	100	1.00	5.00	300.67	3.0067	0.88380
Valid N (listwise)	100					

The third stage of DMIS is Minimization; the statistical summary of this stage is presented in Table 4. The Likert scale questionnaire contains eight statements about this stage. The overall mean score of this stage is 3.476 (*SD* = 0.643). This score indicates that the Sri Lankan Muslim religious leaders agree on the presence of more than one culture.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of perception of Minimization stage.

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S3Q10	100	1	5	286	2.86	1.206
S3Q11	100	1	5	349	3.49	1.259
S3Q12	99	1	5	277	2.80	1.340
S3Q13	99	1	5	433	4.37	0.954
S3Q14	99	1	5	452	4.57	0.745
S3Q15	99	1	5	370	3.74	1.282
S3Q16	99	1	5	329	3.32	1.227
S3Q17	99	1	5	270	2.73	1.236
Minimization	100	1.13	5.00	347.65	3.4765	0.64033
Valid N (listwise)	98					

The Acceptance stage of DMIS included five statements; a descriptive statistical summary of this stage is given in Table 5. All statements scored a mean value of 3.30 and higher with an overall mean score of 4.212 (*SD* = 0.563), representing agree to agree strongly. This indicates that the individual Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka not only accept the cultural differences but also respect the behaviours and values of other cultures.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of perception of the acceptance stage.

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S4Q18	99	1	5	460	4.65	0.837
S4Q19	98	1	5	323	3.30	1.262
S4Q20	98	2	5	459	4.68	0.585
S4Q21	98	1	5	443	4.52	0.789
S4Q22	97	1	5	378	3.90	1.065
Acceptance	99	1.75	5.00	416.95	4.2116	0.56269
Valid N (listwise)	97					

The fifth stage of DMIS is Adaptation. The statistical summary is given in Table 6. The adaptation stage contains six statements. The overall mean score was 4.727 (*SD* = 0.574), which indicates the Sri Lankan Muslim religious leaders strongly agree and can incorporate the worldview of others into their worldview. However, the 25th and 27th statement scores indicate disagreement with the neutral position of the mean scores of 2.80 and 2.91 with the same *SD* = 1.309. These statements are that Muslims built mosques on primary roadsides in the past. This was an actual reason for the anti-Muslim campaign in Sri Lanka.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of perception of Adaptation stage.

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S5Q23	98	1	5	318	3.24	1.236
S5Q24	98	1	5	419	4.28	.993
S5Q25	99	1	5	277	2.80	1.309
S5Q26	99	1	5	332	3.35	1.494
S5Q27	98	1	5	285	2.91	1.309
S5Q28	99	1	5	458	4.63	.750
Integration	99	1.00	5.00	468.00	4.7273	.57413
Valid N (listwise)	97					

The final and sixth stage includes three statements. The integration stage's overall mean value score was 4.727 (*SD* = 0.574), as summarized in Table 7. This indicates that the Sri Lankan Muslim religious leaders perceive themselves as a mediators between different cultures.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of perception of Integration stage.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S6Q29	99	1	5	463	4.68	0.652
S6Q30	99	1	5	481	4.86	0.553
S6Q31	99	1	5	460	4.65	0.787
Integration	99	1.00	5.00	468.00	4.7273	0.57413
Valid N (listwise)	99					

The correlation analysis of the study shows the relationship between the conventional higher education level of Muslim religious leaders and their perception of intercultural competence. There became a point of concern upon observing the results of the responses to the survey questionnaire. Despite the efforts to get maximum numbers of respondents to the survey questions among twenty-five Madrasa in Sri Lanka, minimal numbers of responses were received. Of the responses, 65.4% held a primary university degree in addition to their Madrasa completion certificate. This finding triggered the researchers to analyze further down the same line.

According to the Pearson product correlation, the relationship between education level of the Muslim religious leaders and the means of the ethnocentric parameter of DMIS scores is negative (r = −0.310, p < 0.002). On the other hand, the first parameter of the Denial stage of the DMIS scale showed a higher negative value of 0.405 and was significant to 0.000 level (r = −0.405, p < 0.000), out of the three parameters, Defense, Denial, and Minimization, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Correlation analysis of means of ethnocentric parameters and academic education level of participants.

	Edu	Denial	Ethnocentric
Edu	1		
Denial	−0.405 **	1	
Ethnocentric	−0.310 **	0.781 **	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hence, increasing Muslim religious leaders' conventional academic qualification levels leads to more positive steps in intercultural competence. As shown in Table 9, all three parameters of ethnorelativism of the DMIS model showed a positive Pearson product correlation with the academic education level of the Sri Lankan Muslim religious leaders, unlike the negative correlation of the ethnocentric scale.

Table 9. Correlation analysis of means of ethnorelativism parameters and academic education level of participants.

Item	Edu	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration	Ethno-Relativism
Edu	1				
Acceptance	0.116	1			
Adaptation	0.211 *	0.334 **	1		
Integration	0.095	0.336 **	0.264 **	1	
Ethno-relativism	0.198	0.732 **	0.769 **	0.701 **	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The regression analysis of education with ethnocentric scales validates this finding further. As summarized in Table 10, Muslim religious leaders' conventional academic education level significantly negatively impacts the ethnocentric scale. The dependent variable of the Ethnocentric scale was regressed on predicting the education level. The education level significantly predicted the ethnocentric scale, F = 10.406, $p < 0.002$, which indicates that the education level plays a significant negative role in shaping ethnocentric decisions (b = −0.142, $p < 0.002$). These results direct a negative effect on the education level.

Moreover, $R^2 = 0.096$ depicts 9.6% of the variance in the ethnocentric scale. This indicates that participants strongly disagree with the questionnaire statements in ethnocentric scales with increased academic education levels. However, participants strongly agree with the questionnaire statements in the ethnorelativism scale with the increase in an academic level.

Table 10. Regression analysis of means of ethnocentric scale and academic education level of participants.

Regression Weight	Beta Coefficient	R Square Change	F Change	*p*-Value	Hypothesis
Education level → Ethnocentric scale	−0.142	0.096	10.406	0.002	Supported

This finding could even be supported by the many qualitative statements of the participants. For example, one of the participant's statements is shown below:

'There is a huge difference when comparing my knowledge of other religions and cultures immediately after completing my madrasa studies and my current situation. I gained knowledge of other cultures through engagement with other communities. So, I strongly recommend including the subjects of other religions and cultures in the Madrasa curriculum.'

4.3. The Level of IC among Religious Leaders

The qualitative data analysis found that the level of IC among most Madrasa graduates in Sri Lanka is less than Minimization, according to the DMIS. As far as this research is evaluating the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka based on the DMIS, the finding of this research is presented under six subtopics in line with DMIS levels: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration.

4.3.1. Denial Stage

The Denial is the first stage of the DMIS. Since the person in this stage believes that his or her culture is the only authentic culture and does not recognize the cultural and religious differences, the participants in the qualitative research were asked about their views on other cultures and their interest in learning other than Islamic culture and religions. They were also asked about their institutions offering any courses to their students to learn religions other than Islam.

They all showed interest in learning religions other than Islam and recognized cultural and religious diversity. However, they said that the Madrasa in Sri Lanka does not have

any course for learning other religions, "like any other Madrasa in Sri Lanka, we also do not have any course on other religions" (P_6 621–624). However, few Madrasas offer a course, namely 'history of religion', to briefly introduce Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism (P_2 151–152). On the other hand, very few Madrasa institutions have many courses on religions, such as Religions in Sri Lanka, Religious Dialogue, and Peace Studies (P_1 05–10). Nevertheless, Madrasa in Sri Lanka does not offer any course on other religions in their curriculum.

The absence of a course on religions other than Islam in Madrasas does not mean that these madrasas are in a state of Denial in IC and are not interested in learning other religions and cultures. On the contrary, many did not realize the need to learn about other religions and cultures until recent times (P_6 619–621). It is because the graduates of these madrasas are considered 'spiritual leaders—Shuyukh', and they are expected to work within the Muslim society (P_3 160–162). Hence, they did not need knowledge about others. However, as mentioned earlier, now they have realized this need. Therefore, the absence of courses on religions other than Islam does not convey that they are against cultural diversity.

The qualitative data analysis highlighted this point further. According to some participants in this research, the Madrasa do not teach comparative religion courses due to positive perceptions of others. A principal of a Madrasa said:

> "We were teaching the history of religions in our for a decade. However, we decided to discontinue teaching this course due to some comments from other faith friends. They perceived this course would challenge cultural appreciation as learners might use the information from this course to find fault in other religions. Based on this perspective, we decided to discontinue the course on other religions." (P_5 500–505)

It shows that the Interest in developing an appreciation for cultural diversity and improving IC among students was the reason for not teaching a course on other religions. Another principal further elaborated on this aspect. He said, "although we are not teaching any course on other religions in the curriculum, we do not allow our students to look down on any religion. We used to tell our students that people are servants of God, although they are different in religion and culture, so you have to respect them and their culture" (P_6 634–636). Hence, the absence of a course on other religions in madrasas does not convey that the Madrasas are Denial of other cultures and religions; sometimes, this reflects Acceptance and cultural appreciation.

The friendship of others is another method used in this research to evaluate the level of IC among religious leaders. Regarding friendship with other faith people, the qualitative data analysis found that the Madrasa do not oppose their students to having a friendship with other faith people, "As an institution, we have no arrangement to encourage our students to have other faith friends. However, our institution does not oppose such friendship" (P_2 171–172).

A long history of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka is a fundamental reason for the Madrasa not encouraging their students to have other faith friends: "Since we have had the ethnic issue in our area since 1985–2009, we did not encourage our students to have friendships with other faith people (P_6 641–644) because many Muslims in our area fear having friendships with Tamil youths due to terrorism issues (P_6 649–651)". Hence, the qualitative data analysis revealed that the graduates of Madrasa are not in the denial stage, although they have less interaction with other faith people. Further, some institutions expect their students to have friendships with others when they go to the university (P_2 174–175). It is because these institutions feel their students are immature to have friendships with other faith people during their stay in the institution (P_4 401–403)

4.3.2. Defense

The second stage of the DMIS is Defense. The person in this stage considers others' cultures challenging and threatening. Hence, this person might be critical of others'

behaviours and culture. Therefore, the participants in qualitative data collection in this research were asked about their view of learning/teaching the rights of other faith people.

The data analysis found that the Muslim religious leaders did not feel any threat from other faith people and their culture or religions. They also did not feel uncomfortable with their behaviours. Despite other faith people, mainly the Sinhalese, the primary majority, and the Tamils, the country's second majority, Muslim religious leaders feel comfortable learning about other faith people's rights within the Islamic framework. Although they did not learn about it in separate courses, they studied about it through courses such as: Tafseer—interpretation tradition of the Quran or Hadith courses (P_1 71–72); Fiqh on Zimmis—rights of other faith people under Muslim rules; Fiqh al-Muwatanah—citizenship education; or Usul al-Dawah—basis of communicating with others (P_2 191–193).

It shows that the Muslim religious leaders and the Madrasa in Sri Lanka are not anxious about learning about other faith people and their rights. They also did not stop their students from learning about others due to fear for their faith. Therefore, the qualitative data analysis confirmed that the Muslim religious leaders and the Madrasa in Sri Lanka are not in the Defense stage in IC according to DMIS.

4.3.3. Minimization

The third stage of the DMIS is Minimization. In this stage, people started to find superficial commonalities such as food, dressing, and some other cultural expressions. Hence, the participants in the qualitative analysis were asked about their experiences with commonalities. Furthermore, since these participants are the heads of institutions, the researchers also asked whether they allow their students to discuss commonalities among cultures and religions.

The participants shared their experiences on commonalities regarding food, dress, language, customs, and ceremonies. For instance, one of them said, "the Muslims in our area also practice Tali" (P_6 692–693). Indeed, Tali is a Tamil cultural practice in the marriage ceremony, and the Muslims in many parts of Sri Lanka have a similar tradition. They allowed their students to also discuss standard cultural practices among religious communities (P_3 178–179). However, the Madrasa do not allow their students to discuss shared values in religions. These institutions feel that discussing common values without proper knowledge of other religions is dangerous (P_6 686–688).

A Madrasa principal said that the Madrasa in Sri Lanka might not allow the discussion of shared values among religions even after learning about other religions. Therefore, these Madrasa do not allow their students to discuss shared values among intra-faith groups (P_3 91–95). Further, he elaborated that most Madrasas do not allow for critical thinking (P_3 96–97). Hence, he believes discussing common values among religions will not be possible (P_3 98–99).

However, there are few Madrasa that have courses on other religions, not only allowing students to get involved in the discussion on common values but also to encourage it either through curricula such as assignment, research, and discussions, or co-curricular activities such as competitions such as debate, essay, research, oration, drama, poem (P_1 311–314). These institutions also use the library facility to encourage their students to discuss common values (P_1 98–99). Hence, Muslim religious leaders are optimistic about finding and discussing common superficial cultures. However, they are pessimistic in discussing the shared values among religions except for a few.

4.3.4. Acceptance

Acceptance is the fourth stage of the DMIS. People in this stage are often curious about other cultures and have a desire to learn. The participants in qualitative data collection were asked about their interest in learning about other religions and cultures. They were also asked about any practical, interactive session in their institution, such as students' visits, as it would show their interest in learning about others.

The data analysis shows that the Muslim religious leaders and Madrasa in Sri Lanka did not achieve this stage in IC. It is because no Madrasa has a habit of arranging student visits. All of them said that there is not any student or staff exchange programme or visits in their institution as a way of learning from others (P_2 241–242; P_4 441–442). It shows that these Madrasas are not curious to learn about others and their religions. An institution that established a separate faculty, 'Faculty of Reconciliation', to develop IC (P_1 110–112) also did not create curiosity among their students to learn from others. Hence, these institutions focused on cognitive development but not on developing learning behaviours. Therefore, the Muslim religious leaders did not achieve this level of IC according to the DMIS.

4.3.5. Adaptation

Adaptation is the fifth stage of the DMIS. In this stage, the learners can see the world through others' "eyes" and communicate with others effectively. Hence, the learners understand the cultural experience or criticism of others from the criticizers' point of view. The participants in this research were requested to explain their behaviour in responding to criticism of their religion or culture and how to train their students to respond to it.

The response of Madrasas' principals shows that the Muslim religious leaders did not achieve this level of IC. One of them said he was emotional when somebody criticized an Islamic concept and explained his feelings with an example of criticism of the Burqa. He said, "how another faith questioned what Allah has prescribed" (P_5 596–598).

Regarding the preparation of students in Madrasa to understand the criticism of Muslims, no training is given to the students to see these criticisms from the other faith's point of view. A principal said, "since the education in Madrasa is teacher centered and no critical view is allowed in the classroom, training to see things from others' perspective is impossible" (P_3 328–330). Other participants confirm this situation, "we discuss other faith criticisms on Islam and Muslims when we are teaching courses like Fiqh–Islamic jurisprudence (P_4 461–462) or Research methodology (P_2 251–253) or Comparative religions courses (P_1 114–116). However, unfortunately, we only discuss these criticisms from our perspectives—for instance, the Halal issue. We tried to see the Halal issue from our perspective without seeing it from the perspective of the critique (P_3 331–333)". This shows that the Muslim religious leaders did not achieve the adaptation level in IC since the Madrasas do not have the facility to develop this level of IC among students.

4.3.6. Integration

Integration is the final stage of the DMIS. The learner in this stage can have other cultural experiences move in and out of their worldview. Since the learners in this stage are cultural mediators, they can internalize both cultures. The qualitative data analysis confirms that the Muslim religious leaders did not achieve this stage. "We have hesitation to involve in bridging activities as a participant, not as an initiator. It is because we do not have proper knowledge and guidance on bridging activities, although we have realized it's importance (P_6 601–604)." Although some Madrasas have accommodated other faith teachers, workers, and administrators (P_4 471–473), they also did not find it easy to play a role as the mediator among Muslims and other faith communities (P_2 261–263). It shows that the Madrasa did not reach the integration stage of IC.

5. Discussion

The quantitative data analysis found a minimization level of IC among 35% of Muslim religious leaders and an acceptance and adaptation level of IC among 65% of Muslim religious leaders. The regression analysis showed that the level of conventional education and religious training contributed to this difference. However, qualitative data analysis underlined several other reasons for these differences. The expected role of the graduates is the crucial reason among them.

The expected role of Madrasa graduates is different. Jazeel (2020) listed 13 types of personalities to define the role of Madrasa graduates. The role of Islamic missionaries is

significant among them, and more than 77.8% of Madrasa produce Islamic Da'i or Islamic missionaries. Although Islamic missionary (Da'wah) has two dimensions—(1) bringing other faith people who lost the divine anchorage to the spiritual frontier and (2) effect to transforming the Muslims by safeguarding them from deviation (Don et al. 2012)—the second dimension is popular among the Sri Lankan Muslim context (Don et al. 2012). Hence, the expected role of graduates in most Madrasa is functioning as a Da'i in Muslim society. Nevertheless, the qualitative data of this research found that the 2019 incident made many Madrasa review their objectives and curriculum (Imtiyaz and Saleem 2022).

As far as the graduates of these Madrasas function as Da'i within the Muslim society, they hardly deal with other faith people. Therefore, the curriculum of these madrasas did not include any courses to develop IC. The curriculum model is another reason for this situation in these madrasas. Most of these madrasas use a curriculum based on Darse-Nizami (Khan 2011). It is a system of education introduced by Mulla Nizamuddin of Sihali (d.1748). Since the primary challenge during that period was India's sophisticated and complex bureaucratic system, this system focused on training administrators (Khan 2011). As far as this system was functioning in Muslim India before the advent of the British, the primary challenge during that period was ideological rivalry among Muslims; IC was not their concern (Khan 2011). Therefore, IC was not famous before 1990 (Deardorff et al. 2012, p. 215). Hence, this research found a low level of IC among the graduates whose role in society have been defined as 'Da'i.

However, the IC level of the Madrasas graduates, whose role in society is defined as teachers or scholars, is higher than the others. As explained in this research, the courses these madrasas introduced to develop IC through curriculum or co-curriculum might have contributed to this development. These Madrasa use two methods: (1) developing IC through courses on other religions, and (2) developing IC through discussion during Islamic courses.

Despite having an Acceptance or Adaption level of IC among 65% of the Madrasa graduates, they are hardly involved in intercultural and interreligious activities as the moderator or initiator. It shows that these madrasas, although focused on developing knowledge, did not consider IC skills and attitudes enough.

The Madrasa graduates who defined the role of their graduates as Dai or others have achieved either the level of Minimization or Acceptance and Adaptation only through their religious education. These Madrasas have no multicultural classrooms or other facilities to develop IC. These institutions also have no student or staff exchange programs. These Madrasa are teacher-centric and dogmatic (Husain and Munas 2017). Hence, the level of IC that they have achieved is only through Islamic courses that have no direct connection to IC.

It shows that the Islamic religious education in Sri Lankan madrasas does not oppose multiculturalism and the existence of other faith people. Furthermore, Islamic religious education is the potential to develop IC among Muslim religious leaders if the curriculum of these institutions is reviewed based on the current needs and global context.

Importance of This Research

Since the religious leaders are influential in Sri Lankan society, their level of IC is crucial to promoting peace and social harmony in the country. So is because religious teachings can be used both positively and negatively as a source of peace and harmony and as the basis of violence and radicalism (Islam 2020). Hence, religion's positive or negative function depends on the religious leaders (Basedau et al. 2018). Therefore, the IC level among religious leaders plays a role in social harmony.

This research found a significant difference in the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka. Apart from the level of education, the expected role of graduates and the institution policy make these differences.

This research also found that Islamic religious education in Sri Lankan Madrasas can potentially develop IC and increase the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders. It needs

only a systematic curriculum review based on increasing IC skills and attitudes. This finding encourages the researchers to study other religious institutions such as Buddhist monastic education, Hindu Ashiramam, and Christian seminaries by the DMIS. Hence, religious education can be a solid platform for developing IC and increasing social interaction across cultures and religions.

6. Conclusions

This research evaluates the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka as far as the religious leaders are influential in Sri Lankan society; their IC level matters in bringing peace and social harmony in the country. It is because they can use the religious teachings as a source of peace or violence. The positive or negative interpretations of religious teachings depend on the level of IC of a religious leader. Therefore, the level of IC of a religious leader is crucial in promoting social harmony in a multicultural context.

Unfortunately, the literature found a lack of IC among religious leaders in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this literature found the negative role of religious leaders in ethnic and social violence in the country. Although religions promote peace as their essence, religious leaders have interpreted religious teachings against 'others'. After the 2019 easter attack, referring to Zahran, social activists described the Muslim religious leaders and madrasas as lacking IC. Some of them questioned the madrasa education. This situation motivated the researchers to study the level of IC among Muslim religious leaders in Sri Lanka.

This research used a mixed data collection model for a better result. The data analysis found 'minimization level or third level of IC' in DMIS among all participants in this study. The quantitative data analysis revealed that despite achieving the third level of IC, 65% of participants obtained acceptance and adaptation levels of IC. The regression analysis showed that the level of conventional and religious education contributed to this difference. However, qualitative data analysis underlined several other reasons for this difference. The expected role of the graduates is important among them. The level of religious leaders functioning as *Da'i* in Muslim society is recorded as the third level of IC, whereas the religious leaders are functioning as teachers or other achieved acceptance or adaptation levels of IC. The curriculum of Madrasas might be another reason for this difference. It is because most of the Madrasas that define the role of their graduates as Dai did not teach any course on other religions or cultures. However, the madrasas that expected their graduates to play a role as a teacher or others at least had a course on other religions, such as 'history of religions' in the curriculum.

This research found that the graduates of both the Madrasa that defined the role of its graduates as Dai or others have achieved at least the third level or Minimization in the DMIS model. This is indeed crucial. It is because these madrasas' graduates achieved this level of IC without having any facilities to develop IC, such as multicultural classrooms or environments. Since these madrasas have no other means except Islamic religious courses to develop this level of IC, researchers conclude that the Islamic courses taught in Sri Lankan madrasas do not oppose multiculturalism and the existence of other faith people on the one hand. On the other, these Islamic courses have the potential to develop IC among Muslim religious leaders.

Moreover, this research highlighted the need to revise the Madrasa curriculum in line with multicultural values. Indeed, intercultural competence is not a subject to learn; instead, it is an ability to value equality and justice in a multicultural context. Since Islamic teaching negates oppression, racism, injustice, and inequality, the Muslim religious leaders have to play a crucial role in promoting those Islamic values among Muslims and others.

Limitation: this research was conducted among Muslim religious leaders who graduated more than ten years ago. Therefore, research is needed on current students and their experiences to justify these findings.

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