

Development of Interpersonal Intelligence in Junior Secondary Students in Government Schools: A Study of Problems Faced by Teachers



Nayani Abeyratne

Siyane National College of Education, Veyangoda, Sri Lanka

Professor Shaminda Wanasinghe

The Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala, Ugegoda, Sri Lanka

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the problems faced by teachers in developing interpersonal intelligence among junior secondary students in government schools and to examine the strategies used to foster such skills. The research also sought to provide suggestions to enhance the development of interpersonal intelligence in the classroom. A quantitative approach with a survey design was employed, supported by qualitative data from interviews. The study population consisted of teachers from the Kandy Education Zone in the Kandy District. A sample of 60 junior secondary teachers was selected using simple random sampling, while 10 teacher advisors were chosen through convenience sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires for teachers and interviews for advisors, and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings revealed that most teachers use group and pair activities to promote interpersonal intelligence, particularly in Grades 6-7. Teachers with professional training were more likely to apply effective strategies in their teaching. However, challenges such as time constraints, classroom management, and varied student participation hindered the process. It is concluded that providing professional development opportunities for teachers and encouraging creative, interactive teaching methods are essential to effectively nurture interpersonal intelligence among students.

Keywords: Government Schools, Junior Secondary Students, Interpersonal Intelligence, Teachers

Introduction

The school is the leading institution that provides formal education in a country. The quality and productivity of a country are determined by the quality of the people living in that country. Education can be identified as the main component that affects the quality of education. "Education is not just learning from books or memorizing certain facts. Education is also about seeing and listening to what is read in books, whether it is true or false." (Krishnamoorthy, 2011) This statement means that the knowledge gained through education should be used for living, not only for passing exams, but also for living in a different aspect. Taneja (1990) has defined that education

should bring about the complete development of the individual in terms of physical, mental, linguistic, aesthetic, etc. This also makes it clear that education should bring about overall development instead of increasing knowledge and passing exams. Education plays a great role in creating peace and harmony among individuals in a society. In this regard, developing interpersonal intelligence among individuals can be pointed out as a timely need.

Also, the basic objective of Sri Lankan education is to endow the society with a person who has a harmonious personality. Based on that objective, seven basic skills have been introduced. Although each curriculum has been prepared in

Sri Lankan schools to engage in a learning and teaching process that develops cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills in the student, it is questionable whether the student receives these areas in a balanced manner through Sri Lankan education. Kariyawasam (2007) has quoted that the knowledge that has been discovered about learning is not utilized in the learning and teaching process in current schools, as stated by Skinner (1904-1990). Further drawing attention to this issue, Kariyawasam (2007) has stated as follows. There is a significant gap between the basic knowledge of the books distributed by schools and the knowledge that is appropriate to create an efficient, virtuous, and wise person required by today's extremely complex society.

Apart from what education bestows on the child and what it bestows on society, it is clear that there is a difference between what society expects from education. That is the problem or research gap of this research. Because education prioritizes knowledge and carries out the learning and teaching process, it is a question of whether the current education system produces individuals who are full of social skills that society expects, such as intelligence, leadership skills, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and the ability to understand and relate to others.

Whether traditional Sri Lankan education is suitable for the 21st century remains a question. That is, the question is whether the teacher creates opportunities for the development of interpersonal intelligence in students while conducting the learning and teaching process so that the learning skills related to the 21st century, such as communication, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration. While there is a need to develop these multifaceted skills and develop interpersonal intellectual skills in students, it can be pointed out as a problem that it does not happen in the formal classroom.

Several problems that affect the development of interpersonal intellectual skills in students have been outlined in Athukorala (1999):

- Lack of modernization in the learning-teaching process.

- Traditionalism in the classroom.
- Decreased connection between the school and the community.
- Excessive burden of the curriculum taught in the school.
- The relationship between student education and the world of work is very distant.
- The humanization expected from education is not taking place.
- Examination-centric education pattern.

In such problems, education only develops one aspect of the students and whether the human qualities and social skills of the students are developed through education remains a problem. Thus, it can be pointed out that developing interpersonal relationships through school education is a timely need.

The following objectives were used for this research study.

- To investigate the strategies used by teachers to develop interpersonal intelligence
- To uncover the problems faced by teachers in developing interpersonal intelligence
- To present suggestions to teachers for developing interpersonal intelligence in the classroom

Literature Review

A literature review is essential in research to provide theoretical and conceptual foundations for understanding the research problem. This study explores the development of interpersonal intelligence among junior secondary students, drawing primarily from Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) and Constructivist Learning Theory, which together form the theoretical framework of the study.

Howard Gardner, an American psychologist, first introduced the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983, proposing that intelligence is not a single general ability but a combination of different cognitive capacities. Initially, he identified seven types of intelligence and later expanded them to nine by including naturalistic and existential intelligences. The nine types include verbal-lin-

guistic, musical-rhythmic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential intelligences. Each individual possesses these intelligences in varying degrees.

Among them, interpersonal intelligence the focus of this study is defined as the ability to understand, interpret, and respond appropriately to the emotions, motivations, and behaviors of others (Gardner, 2011). Dien et al. (2013) describe it as the mental ability to apply knowledge, manipulate social situations effectively, and think abstractly. Widyasari (2016) and Armstrong (2009) further explain that interpersonal intelligence, also known as social intelligence, enables individuals to maintain positive relationships, cooperate with others, and respond empathetically. According to Dien and Wustqa (2018), interpersonal intelligence encompasses four major areas: communication, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution, all of which are essential for social functioning.

Safaria (2005) and Tirri et al. (2013) categorize interpersonal intelligence into three main dimensions: social sensitivity, social understanding, and social communication. Social sensitivity refers to recognizing and interpreting non-verbal cues, emotions, and expressions of others. Social understanding is the ability to analyze social situations, identify problems, and find effective solutions, while social communication involves the exchange of ideas and emotions through verbal and non-verbal means. Well-developed interpersonal intelligence allows individuals to build strong relationships, work collaboratively, respect others' views, and adapt to social environments (Veronika, 2021).

Gardner (2011) further divided interpersonal intelligence into two components: social awareness and social facilitation. Social awareness involves empathy and the understanding of others' feelings, whereas social facilitation is the ability to respond appropriately and constructively to those emotions. Teachers play a vital role in developing both these components in students. By fostering empathy, cooperation, and effective

communication, teachers contribute significantly to the social development of learners.

The teacher's role as a mediator in developing interpersonal intelligence is central to school-based education. Veronika (2011) emphasized that teachers should engage students in experiential learning activities that enhance interaction, communication, and collaboration. Teachers are advised to communicate actively, provide opportunities for peer interaction, and design learning experiences that encourage students to share ideas, exchange information, and build positive relationships.

In addition to Gardner's framework, Constructivist Learning Theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how interpersonal intelligence can be developed in educational settings. Constructivism, influenced by psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and Lev Vygotsky, posits that learners construct knowledge through active engagement and social interaction rather than passive reception. Abeypala (2020) notes that creativity, a key outcome of constructivist learning, allows learners to change existing conditions and build new contexts through interaction and exploration.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory highlights the importance of social interaction in learning, emphasizing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners develop understanding through collaboration with more capable peers or teachers. In this context, interpersonal intelligence naturally emerges as students communicate, collaborate, and co-construct knowledge. The teacher, therefore, moves from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator or "transformative role" (Abeypala, 2015), guiding learners toward self-discovery and social engagement.

Constructivist learning encourages teaching methods such as group projects, discussions, and cooperative activities, all of which enhance social interaction, teamwork, and communication, key aspects of interpersonal intelligence. Through such strategies, students learn empathy, respect for differing opinions, patience, listening, and mu-

tual support. These competencies align closely with Gardner's interpersonal intelligence dimensions. Abeyapala (2015) suggests methods like the project method, group method, and exploration method to stimulate creativity, communication, and cooperation among students.

Furthermore, constructivist classrooms promote student-centered learning, where learners take ownership of their learning process. Simsek (2013) argues that this approach strengthens interpersonal intelligence as students actively participate in group tasks and problem-solving activities. Slavin (1993), as cited in Simsek (2013), identifies cooperative learning as one of the most effective strategies for developing interpersonal skills in classrooms. In cooperative learning, students work in teams to achieve shared academic goals, which fosters peer support, collaboration, and social responsibility.

Sudzina (1993) describes cooperative learning as the most successful instructional approach in the history of education for nurturing social and emotional competencies. Teachers can enhance interpersonal intelligence by integrating group activities, seminars, role-plays, and peer discussions into lesson plans. Lunenburg (2014) further suggests incorporating modern learning aids such as audiovisual materials, digital tools, and electronic media to support interaction and engagement.

Bratcher (2012) provides several practical strategies teachers can use to develop interpersonal intelligence in students:

Designing projects and activities for cooperative learning through peer groups.

Creating opportunities for students to collaborate and build interpersonal relationships.

Encouraging students to engage with communities beyond the school.

Promoting peer storytelling, writing, and teaching activities.

Using creative teaching tools such as puppets for collaborative learning experiences.

These strategies emphasize that interpersonal intelligence is not innate but can be developed

through structured, interactive, and cooperative classroom environments. When teachers design lessons that prioritize communication, empathy, and teamwork, students learn to understand others' emotions, cooperate effectively, and contribute positively to group dynamics.

Thus, the literature clearly highlights that developing interpersonal intelligence requires intentional pedagogical planning grounded in both Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and constructivist principles. Gardner's framework provides the conceptual understanding of interpersonal intelligence, while constructivist learning theory offers the methodological basis for cultivating it through active participation and collaboration.

Methodology

The methodology and design used for the success of a research are very important. The design can be used to guide research in the right direction. Accordingly, the research on the problems arising in the development of interpersonal intelligence of junior secondary school students in government schools was conducted as descriptive research. The main objective of the descriptive research method in the study is to obtain information about what is there. The existing situation is as it is. Furthermore, the objective is to present the relationship between two variables and the functioning of the variables, and analyze those facts. Accordingly, this descriptive research was conducted by following the survey design under the quantitative approach. Also, under the descriptive research method, interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data. Triangulation was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the analyzed data. Due to a limited sample, it was possible to minimize the errors of judgment and ensure the reliability of the information.

The population of this research is teachers engaged in the teaching and learning process in government schools in Sri Lanka. Among them, teachers engaged in teaching in the Kandy Education Zone of the Kandy District were selected as the study population. 60 teachers were selected

from among the teachers teaching junior secondary grades in the Kandy Zone as the sample for the study, following simple random sampling. Also, 10 teacher advisors were selected according to convenience sampling. A questionnaire was used for data collection for teachers, and an interview schedule was used for teacher advisors. Data analysis was carried out using quantitative and qualitative methods. The first part of the questionnaire used for data collection obtained personal information from the teachers in the sample. The second part included questions that were prepared according to a five-point scale and revealed the strategies and problems used by teachers to develop interpersonal intelligence.

Data Analysis

The total sample of teachers selected for this research is 60. The sample has been divided as follows according to the personal information provided by them. According to the school type, 25% of the teachers belonged to the 1st school type and 40% of the teachers belonged to the 2nd school type. Similarly, 35% of the teachers who belonged to the 2nd type were included in the sample. Also, when focusing on the highest professional qualification obtained by the teachers selected for the sample, 41.1% of the teachers had a postgraduate diploma. 31.1% had a diploma in teaching science, and 26.8% had no professional qualification.

The first objective was to investigate the strategies used by teachers in the teaching-learning process in the development of interpersonal intelligence in junior secondary students. Three areas of social understanding, social sensitivity and social communication were identified as areas that can be followed to develop interpersonal intelligence. Attention was paid to the strategies used by teachers to develop these areas. Accordingly, 49.4% of the respondents responded that using strategies such as storytelling and singing songs to develop social communication, exchanging ideas with students at all times and providing opportunities for students to exchange subject matter in the teaching-learning process were “necessarily” done. Similarly, 33.3% responded

that these strategies are used “often”. Also, 14.4% responded that these strategies are sometimes used. Similarly, 2.7% responded that they did not. According to this data, it is clear that school teachers use practical activities more to develop interpersonal intelligence. One reason for this can be that they are directed to do such activities under the current competency-based education system. There is still a group of people who are engaged in teaching in the traditional way in schools. It can be assumed that such a group would have responded that they did not. Also, 35% of the respondents responded that they definitely do things such as providing group or pair activities to students in the learning and teaching process for the development of social understanding in students, allocating time at each period to enjoy and appreciate each other’s creations at the end of the activities, and directing students for art competitions, exhibitions, various decorations in the school, and projects. Also, the response that they often do for that was 38.3%. Also, 24.4% responded that sometimes. 1.6% responded that no and 0.5% responded that never. The above data shows that there is a lack of teachers’ attention to the above activities due to time management issues. Therefore, it is possible that the response that it is used necessarily may have taken a lower value of 38.3%.

In order to develop social sensitivity in students, the strategies of directing students to help students who need support in learning, giving students the opportunity to present their creations at the end of each lesson, and providing opportunities to engage in activities by exchanging learning materials have been responded to by 33.8% and to that, 35% responded that it is used “definitely”. The response rate for “sometimes” was 22.7%. The response rate for “no” was 7.7% and the response rate for “not at all” was 0.5%. The reason for the change in the above responses can be attributed to the fact that it is quite difficult to use measures such as directing students to help students who need support in learning in the current classroom. Another reason for this change in the above responses can be attributed

to the fact that due to the highly competitive and exam-centered education system in the current school system, there is less motivation among school students to help their fellow students.

Data was also collected on the teaching and learning methods used by teachers in the learning and teaching process under the strategies adopted by teachers for the development of interpersonal intelligence. The responses received from the teachers are presented in Figure 1 below.

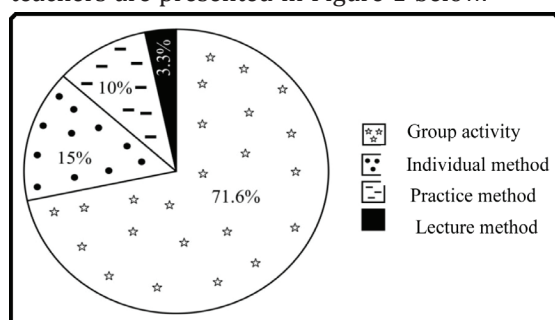


Fig. 1: showing strategies teachers adopt to develop interpersonal intelligence

According to the data shown in Figure 1 above, 71.6% of teachers frequently provide group or pair activities to students, 15% use individual learning method, 10% use practice method, and 3.3% use lecture method. It can be stated from

this data that since teaching activities are currently carried out in schools based on the competency-based education system, there is a greater tendency towards group and pair activities.

52.5% of teachers responded that they use group or pair activities for practical activities. Also, the response analysis revealed that 22.5% use the step learning method. The responses also revealed that 16.6% use the single assignment method, 7.5% use the simulation teaching method and 0.83% use other methods.

In the interpretation of the teacher interview data, it is clear that teachers work to develop students' interpersonal intelligence using group and pair activities. It can be said that this is a positive trend. In this regard, it was stated in the interview conducted with the teacher advisors that it was observed that teachers work to develop more interpersonal intelligence during student activities. It is clear from the teachers' responses that teachers can work to develop students' interpersonal intelligence during group activities.

The second objective of the research was to find out the problems that arise in the development of students' interpersonal intelligence. In this regard, Table 1 has been created based on the questionnaire presented to the teachers.

Table 1: Problems faced by teachers in using group or pair activities in the classroom

S.No.	Problem	Frequency	Percentage.
1	Slow learners skipping activities	32	53
2	Unable to finish the lesson on time	31	52
3	Not all students grasp the subject equally	26	43
4	Children behaving noisily	24	40
5	Unable to accomplish all the objectives as planned	20	34
6	Unable to manage time	12	20
7	Difficulty in providing the knowledge needed to pass the exam	12	20
8	Difficulty in controlling the class	12	20
9	Unable to cover the syllabus	7	12
10	Other problems	7	12

According to Table 1 above, it is clear that the main problems in developing interpersonal in-

telligence are that slow learners do not actively participate in the lesson: 53%* and cannot fin-

ish classes on time: 52%*. The main reason for this may be that students spend too much time on practical activities. However, it is essential to provide more such opportunities for the development of interpersonal intelligence. The interview with the speed teacher advisors also revealed that in order to develop interpersonal intelligence, students should be given more opportunities to engage in practical activities. However, they further pointed out that there is a problem of whether a group activity can be successfully completed within a specific period of 40 minutes in the timetable.

The following are some suggestions made by the data providers through questionnaires and interviews regarding strategies that can be followed to develop interpersonal intelligence.

- Always allow students to interact with other students.
- Organize field trips to visit places related to the subject topics.
- Incorporate leadership and personality development programs.
- Engage in group activities in the classroom, the teaching and learning process.
- Direct students to activities that allow them to work collaboratively.
- Teach the subject matter learned in class in a way that is relevant to the students' daily lives.
- Provide group projects for students to complete after school and during vacations.
- Direct each student to co-curricular activities that are implemented in the school.
- Educate students about society and the problems existing in society, and provide them with experiences.
- Including lessons that can develop interpersonal relationships in the syllabus.

Suggestions

According to the findings of this research, the following suggestions are presented.

- The learning and teaching process should always create opportunities for students to build relationships with each other.

- Provide opportunities to visit places related to the subject topics collectively. This gives students the opportunity to discuss and understand each other.
- Provide opportunities for groups to go on short field trips and present discoveries through exploration.
- Home is the first school. Familiarize parents with interpersonal relationships even at home. Since the familiarity that occurs at home directly affects the functioning of the school, children willingly engage in interpersonal relationships.
- Connect learning to real life and direct them to activities related to appropriate topics. This leads to discussions about certain situations that arise in real life and creating mental images about them. This leads to the emergence of situations.
- The need to take measures to distance children from the exam mentality can be presented as suggestions. Or children forget all human feelings and work towards the exam. Therefore, children are born with selfishness, empathy, and sensitivity. Therefore, it can be suggested to provide opportunities to work with a relaxed mind and give time to interpersonal relationships through the learning and teaching process.
- Providing group or pair activities to students. Group or pair activities enable students to develop social understanding, social communication, and social sensitivity. Therefore, it is suggested to create such opportunities in the classroom.
- By making students aware of cooperation and interconnection, students understand the value and need for interpersonal intelligence. Therefore, awareness is important.
- Including lessons related to social sensitivity, social understanding, and social communication in the syllabus. This makes it easier for children to internalize this concept and apply it within themselves.

- Providing opportunities to collectively carry out practical activities related to each lesson. This gives children the opportunity to truly understand each other's thoughts, establish correct communication, and understand each other's feelings through observation.
- Teachers should be directed to professional training to fulfill their professional qualifications. Accordingly, by fulfilling their professional qualifications, teachers show a positive tendency to use strategies to develop interpersonal intelligence. The problems that arise there are minimized.

Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers play a crucial role in developing interpersonal intelligence among junior secondary students through the effective use of appropriate teaching strategies. The findings reveal that teachers adopt various approaches, particularly group and pair activities to foster social understanding, social sensitivity, and social communication, which are key components of interpersonal intelligence. In Grades 6-7, teachers use these interactive strategies in both theoretical and practical lessons, helping students engage meaningfully with peers and develop cooperative skills. Furthermore, teachers with formal professional training and pedagogical knowledge demonstrate a greater tendency to employ strategies that actively promote interpersonal intelligence in the classroom. Observational data further confirm that most teachers use these methods with a positive attitude toward nurturing students' social development.

The study also identified several challenges in implementing such strategies. Teachers face issues related to classroom and time management, while differences in student abilities often hinder group collaboration. Talented students may dominate or avoid teamwork, and slower learners sometimes withdraw from participation. These findings highlight the need for continuous professional training to help teachers manage diverse classrooms and apply strategies effectively. Based on these insights, it is recommended that

teachers integrate more collaborative and co-curricular activities such as field trips, projects, and group assignments to strengthen social interaction. Such practices provide students with opportunities to build empathy, cooperation, and communication skills are essential traits for interpersonal intelligence.

Ultimately, the development of interpersonal intelligence is fundamental to producing emotionally intelligent and socially responsible citizens. In an era where technological dependence often weakens human connections, fostering interpersonal skills in schools is vital. Education must, therefore, emphasize human interaction, empathy, and collaboration to shape a compassionate generation capable of building meaningful relationships and contributing positively to society.

References

1. Abeyapala, R. (2015). *New Learning Trends 4*. Kottawa: Sara Publishers, [N.P.].
2. Abeyapala, R. (2018a). *Contemporary Educational Concepts*. Kottawa: Sara Publishers, [N.P.].
3. Abeyapala, R. (2018b). *Intelligence and Multiple Intelligences*. Kottawa: Sara Publishers, [N.P.].
4. Abeyapala, R. (2020a). *New Trends in Learning Psychology*. Kottawa: Sara Publishers, [N.P.].
5. Abeyapala, R. (2020b). *Use of Multiple Intelligences in School*. Kottawa: Sara Publishers, [N.P.].
6. Armstrong, T. (2009). *Multiple intelligences in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, [N.P.].
7. Athukorala, H.N. (1999). *Educational and Psychological Fiction*. Colombo: Shiksha Mandira Publications, [N.P.].
8. Bratcher, S. (2012). *The learning-to-write process in elementary schools*. New York: Routledge, [N.P.].
9. Dien, C.A. & Wustqa, D.U. (2018). IOP Conference Series: *Journal of Physics*: doi: 10.1088/1742-6596/1108/1/012080.
10. Gardner, H. (2011). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
11. Kariyawasam, C. (2007). *New Educational Principles*. Kottawa : Sara Publishers, [N.P.].
12. Krishnamurthy (2011). *Education Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Krishnamurthy Foundation, [N.P.].
13. Lunenburg, F.C. (2014). *Intellectual Diversity*. *International Journal of Scholarly Academic*, pp. 16.

-
14. Safaria, T. (2005). Interpersonal intelligence: Metode pengembangan kecerdasan interpersonal anak. Jakarta: Amara Books, [N.P.].
 15. Simsek, U. (2013). Name of Article: International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*, 4(3), [N.P.]. (July 2013). ISSN 1309-6249.
 16. Sudzina, M. (1993, February). Dealing with diversity in the classroom: A case study approach. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Los Angeles. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 354 233).
 17. Tirri, K., Nokelainen, P., & Komulainen, E. (2013). Multiple intelligences: Can they be measured? *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling*, 55(4), pp. 438-461.
 18. Veronika, D.A. (2021). Early Childhood. Jambi: Islamic Education Study Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher, State Islamic University, Sultan Thaha Saifuddin, [N.P.].
 19. Widyasari, F. (2016). The correlation among reading attitude, interpersonal intelligence, and reading comprehension. *SSRN*, 7(2), pp. 288-298.