

English Language and its Role in Professional Identity Formation and Career Mobility of a Selected Group of Sri Lankan First-Language Sinhala-Speaking Lawyers: A Narrative Inquiry

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This study aims to explore the role played by the English language in professional identity formation and career mobility of a selected group of Sri Lankan first-language Sinhala-speaking lawyers. The study highlights a dearth of research with regard to the relationship between the English language and legal professionals in the Sri Lankan context. Four participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their level of fluency in English. Using a narrative inquiry approach, data was gathered using life history interviews and autobiographies. This study concludes that there is a link between English, and professional identity formation through upward career mobility. It highlights that proficiency in English affects professional identity formation in terms of career mobility as its lack creates a glass ceiling. It also highlights that the gatekeeping practices of the English language, and its role as a form of cultural and symbolic capital affect professional identity formation. It also reveals that a performative dimension of language (rather than an actual in-depth knowledge of the language), the ability to perform an 'English identity' in court can be empowering in professional identity formation for the selected group of lawyers.

Keywords: English, Law, Professional identity formation, Career mobility, Narrative inquiry