

Deconstructing the "Religious Wall: Evaluating Multi-Religious Education as a Strategy for Long-term Conflict Prevention.

Dr. Chamila Siriwardana¹, G.K.Y.S. Siriwardana²

Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya¹

Assistant Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya²

chamilas@kln.ac.lk¹

yasadisiriwardana05@gmail.com²

In modern society, religious identity often serves as a "religious wall" an invisible but rigid boundary that can be weaponized to foster prejudice and violent conflict. Traditional educational models frequently reinforce these divisions through segregated schooling. This paper argues for a shift toward Integrated Religious Education (IRE), where students of diverse faiths learn together to deconstruct these walls and transform classrooms into laboratories for peacebuilding.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate how a multi-religious education system functions as a proactive strategy for long-term conflict prevention and resolution. Specifically, it explores pedagogical approaches that bridge religious divides and examines the systemic challenges of implementing such a framework in diverse societies.

This study utilizes a qualitative and comparative analytical framework. It applies established psychological and sociological theories, including Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, and Putnam's Social Capital to evaluate educational models. The research incorporates a comparative case study analysis of diverse global contexts, including Singapore, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, and Sri Lanka, to identify the factors that lead to either successful social integration or continued segregation.

The study finds that physical proximity alone is insufficient for peace; without "structured contact," proximity can actually heighten friction, as seen in the "Two Schools Under One Roof" model in Bosnia. Successful models, like Singapore's, transition societies from "Mechanical Solidarity" (unity through sameness) to "Organic Solidarity" (unity through interdependence). In

the Sri Lankan context, findings indicate that while policy attempts have been made, the "Medium of Instruction" remains a significant structural wall that prevents genuine intergroup contact. The research highlights that IRE builds "Bridging Social Capital," which acts as a psychological buffer against radicalization.

The paper concludes that the "Religious Wall" is a correctable effect of educational modes rather than a necessary outcome of diversity. By adopting an "Inclusive Secularism" approach and focusing on shared human values rather than dogmatic differences, schools can move from passive coexistence to active integration. Ultimately, IRE equips the next generation with the "Dialogue of Life" skills necessary to manage differences without resorting to violence.

Keywords: Integrated Religious Education (IRE), Conflict Resolution, Social Cohesion, Long term conflict prevention, Bridging Social Capital.