03rd International Research Conference on Management Studies

22nd February 2026

PROCEEDINGS

"Shaping The Future: Mastering the Next Gen-Management"

Smarter Systems, Technology, Innovation"

“Shaping The Future: Mastering the Next Gen-Management”

Smarter Systems, Technology, Innovation

Conference Tracks

People, Inclusion, and Equity in HRM Practices

Health, Wellbeing and Mindfulness at Work

AI and Digitalization

Organisational Behavior and Human Psychology

Insights in Marketing/ Accounting and Finance

Organized by

Human Resources Management Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka – 22nd February 2026

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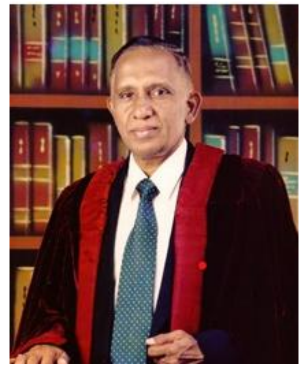
MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR



Emeritus Professor W. Indralal De Silva
PhD (ANU-Australia), MA (ANU-Australia), BA (UoC)
Vice Chancellor - Human Resources Management Institute.
Former Senior Professor (Chair) of Demography,
Former Dean Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo.
Former Executive Director, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo.
Former Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences (NCAS), UGC, Colombo.

It is a privilege to address you today on a topic that is both timely and critical Sri Lanka's demographic transformation and the evolving role of artificial intelligence in research and decision-making.

Recent evidence clearly highlights a significant demographic shift in Sri Lanka. The country is now experiencing a sharp decline in fertility rates, with estimates suggesting a move towards ultra-low levels, alongside increasing population ageing and youth migration. Over the past decade, birth rates have declined substantially, and recent data indicate that population growth has already begun to reverse. These changes are not merely statistical trends they have profound implications for businesses, particularly in terms of shrinking labor force participation, changing consumer patterns, and long-term market sustainability.

In such a context, research plays a vital role in guiding strategic planning. However, we must also critically reflect on the growing reliance on artificial intelligence tools. While platforms such as ChatGPT provide rapid access to global data, the accuracy of outputs depends heavily on how questions are framed. As seen in recent examples, AI-generated responses on Sri Lanka's fertility trends can vary significantly and may even be misleading if not carefully validated. Therefore, the key message is clear, AI should support, not substitute, human judgement. Over-reliance on automated systems risks weakening analytical thinking and may lead to flawed strategic decisions.

As educators and leaders, we must promote a research culture that integrates critical thinking, methodological rigour, and responsible AI usage. The future of higher education and national development depends on how effectively we balance technological innovation with human insight. Let us move forward with a commitment to evidence based decision making and sustainable progress.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR / CEO

Mr Gihan Talgodapitiya
FCMA, MBA (NUS)
Corporate Trainer
Director / CEO Human Resources Management Institute.

Standing before such a distinguished gathering of thinkers, practitioners, and future leaders is both an honour and a responsibility. Platforms like this are not merely events; they are spaces where ideas are challenged, perspectives are reshaped, and the future of management begins to take form.

Today's theme, *"Shaping the Future: Mastering the Next Gen-Management,"* captures the reality we are all experiencing. We are operating in a world defined by VUCA volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In this environment, change is no longer occasional; it is constant and often unpredictable. What worked yesterday may not work tomorrow, and what we plan today may need to evolve rapidly.

For decades, management thinking was anchored in concepts such as sustainable competitive advantage, as emphasised by scholars like Michael Porter. However, in today's dynamic landscape, this notion is being redefined. Competitive advantage is becoming increasingly temporary and fluid, requiring organisations to continuously adapt, innovate, and reposition themselves. Thought leaders such as Rita McGrath highlight that agility, rather than stability, is now the key driver of success.

In the Sri Lankan context, despite economic and structural challenges, we have witnessed encouraging signs of resilience. Local organisations have adapted, innovated, and in many cases, reached international standards. These developments remind us that even in uncertainty, there are opportunities for growth and transformation.

To shape the business future effectively, organisations must move beyond traditional thinking. This means embedding innovation and creativity into everyday practices, fostering a culture that encourages new ideas, and maintaining a strong focus on customer needs. And also the rapid pace of change demands a commitment to continuous learning and skill development, yesterday's competencies may quickly become obsolete.

Conferences such as this play a critical role in bridging theory and practice. They provide a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing that can drive meaningful impact.

As we move forward, let us not simply respond to change but lead it. Let us rethink, reimagine, and reshape the future of management with confidence and purpose.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Prof. W.M.C.B.Wanninayake
Dean,
Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies,
University of Kelaniya

Distinguished guests, respected academics, researchers, practitioners, and future leaders, Every important decision begins with a question. But the quality of that decision depends on something even more important: what evidence do we use to answer it?

In business, we often speak about data, strategy, innovation, and intelligence. Yet many decisions are still shaped by authority, tradition, common sense, media myths, and personal experience rather than research. This raises an important concern: why does academic research still have limited influence on real business decision-making?

At the same time, higher education institutions increasingly promote research publications to strengthen reputation and improve global rankings. However, business management continues to make a comparatively limited contribution to highly ranked and indexed research, especially when compared with STEM disciplines.

Therefore, the real question is not simply, "How can we publish more?" but rather, "How can we make business management research more impactful?" To answer this, we must explore new research frontiers. Today's environment is shaped by VUCA — volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In such a world, researchers must move beyond studying concepts in isolation and pay greater attention to changing contexts. We must identify the new challenges and opportunities emerging from technological, demographic, economic, environmental, and political change.

One of the most important frontiers is digital transformation and artificial intelligence.

AI is transforming how we work, communicate, analyse information, and make decisions. This leads to critical research questions: Can AI replace human intelligence? What social impact does AI create? And how can businesses use AI as an opportunity?

These questions can be explored from three perspectives: philosophical, ethical, and technological.

From a philosophical perspective, researchers must examine how AI influences human behaviour, the characteristics of next-generation employees, how they should be motivated, and which leadership styles are most suitable for future workplaces.

From an ethical perspective, AI raises major concerns about job displacement, inequality, lack of transparency, bias, discrimination, privacy, accountability, security risks, environmental costs, and decisions that may improve efficiency while conflicting with human values. These are not simply technological concerns; they are significant management research questions.

From a technological perspective, AI already demonstrates considerable potential. The presentation highlights that 65% of companies were using generative AI regularly in 2024, while evidence also suggests that AI can significantly improve worker productivity and task completion. However, AI is not the only future research agenda.

Another major frontier is population ageing. In many developed countries, elderly populations are expected to increase considerably by 2050. This will affect labour markets, retirement systems, healthcare, consumer behaviour, and business opportunities.

We must also examine the growth of the female segment, increasing female employment, and changing workforce participation. These developments create important questions around leadership, entrepreneurship, consumption, employment and organisational policy.

Similarly, household structures are changing. In Sri Lanka, household size has gradually declined, while the proportion of female-headed households has become increasingly significant. These changes have important implications for consumer behaviour, housing, financial services, retailing, and employment practices.

Beyond these trends, researchers must also consider natural disasters, environmental change, economic crises and resilience, political developments, and the impact of global politics on business.

The message is clear: we must research the world as it is becoming, not simply the world as it was.

But impactful research requires more than selecting a new topic. An impactful researcher should adopt a 360-degree approach, creating impact through collaboration, community, commercial value, and communication.

Research should build partnerships, contribute to society, create practical value, and reach audiences beyond academic journals. At the same time, a strong research career requires clarity, courtesy, collaboration, and consistency — clarity in research scope, courtesy in professional networks, collaboration to create synergy, and consistency in communicating our work. Let me conclude with the powerful reminder: “The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday’s logic.”

As researchers, we cannot use yesterday’s assumptions to answer tomorrow’s questions. We must explore new frontiers, challenge conventional thinking, and produce research that is not only published, but also used, valued, communicated, and remembered.

Because ultimately, the future of management will be shaped not by how much information we produce, but by the quality of the questions we ask and the impact of the knowledge we create.

GUEST SPEECH

Mr. Rajeeve Goonetileke
Managing Director,
Hayleys Eco Solutions

I am here today at the kind invitation of Mr. Thalgodapitiya, whom I have known for more than three decades, dating back to my Unilever days. Over the years, Gihan has become a significant figure in Sri Lanka's education ecosystem. What I admire most is not simply institutional growth, but the purpose behind that growth—leadership shaped by values, commitment, and above all, sustained passion. Gihan, thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts at this forum.

Let me begin with a simple thought experiment.
Imagine that five years from now, many of the skills you rely on today are no longer relevant. This possibility captures the reality of the world we now live in: a world of relentless turbulence.

Crisis itself is not new. Humanity has always faced wars, pandemics, economic shocks, and technological disruption. What is different today is that turbulence is no longer episodic. It has become the operating environment itself. Geopolitical instability, technological disruption, demographic shifts, and societal fragmentation increasingly overlap and reinforce one another, creating what we now describe as a polycrisis. The playing field has changed and quite simply, the old playbook is broken.

Traditional command-and-control leadership models are no longer sufficient for a world defined by speed, complexity, and ambiguity. The key question is therefore:

How do we lead when the ground itself is constantly shifting beneath our feet?

This is where next-generation management becomes essential.
Three forces are particularly important. First, the velocity of change. Artificial intelligence, automation, and continuous digital transformation are reshaping work at remarkable speed. Static strategies quickly lose relevance; organisations must continuously adapt. Second, we live in a hyper-connected world. A disruption in one country can affect supply chains, markets, and behaviour across the globe. Volatility is

no longer an exception it is structural.

Third, and most importantly, is the human element. Employees today seek more than a salary. They look for purpose, ethical leadership, flexibility, belonging, and trust. In uncertain times, people need leaders who act not merely as commanders, but as coaches leaders who listen, empathies, and create confidence.

For researchers, this raises important questions: What leadership behaviours build trust in chaotic environments? How should decision-making evolve when uncertainty becomes the norm? And how can institutions remain resilient and credible amid continuous disruption?

The new management playbook requires several mindset shifts: from control to collaboration, from profit alone to multi-stakeholder impact, from prediction to resilience, from rigidity to sense-and-respond systems, and from siloed expertise to cross-disciplinary insight.

In practice, organisations must strengthen resilience, agility, transparent communication, and distributed decision-making. We must also distinguish between crisis management and crisis leadership: crisis management reacts, while crisis leadership anticipates and prepares.

Technology and AI will be central to this future, but digital intelligence must always be balanced with ethical judgement. Technology without responsible leadership can amplify bias, inequality, privacy risks, and mistrust.

Above all, we must preserve the human core. In turbulent times, empathy, wellbeing, psychological safety, and trust are not soft issues they are resilience multipliers.

Ladies and gentlemen, turbulence will not disappear, uncertainty will not apologise, and complexity will not simplify itself for us. But leadership can evolve. Management can transform. Organisations can adapt and thrive.

The future belongs to leaders and researchers who can make sense of complexity, embrace technology without losing humanity, and see turbulence not only as a threat, but as a catalyst for reinvention.

MESSAGE FROM THE CONFERENCE CHAIR

Dr. Rajitha Silva
Senior Lecturer
Head of the Department
Faculty of Management and Finance,
University of Colombo

It is both an honour and a privilege to welcome you to this year's Research Conference, held under the timely and forward-looking theme, "Shaping the Future: Mastering Next-Gen Management."

We gather at a defining moment when organisations, industries, and societies are being reshaped by rapid technological advancement, evolving workforce expectations, global uncertainty, and the growing demand for sustainable and responsible progress. In this increasingly dynamic environment, the future of management will depend not merely on our ability to respond to change, but on our capacity to anticipate it, shape it, and lead through it with knowledge, agility, and purpose.

The focus of this conference on Smarter Systems, Technology, and Innovation reflects the powerful forces redefining the contemporary management landscape. Artificial intelligence, data-driven decision-making, automation, digital transformation, and intelligent systems are creating new possibilities for organisational efficiency, competitiveness, and growth. Yet, the true value of these advancements lies in how effectively they are integrated with strategic leadership, human capability, ethical responsibility, and innovative thinking.

Next-generation management therefore requires us to move beyond conventional approaches. It calls for leaders who are adaptive and visionary, organisations that are resilient and learning-oriented, and management systems that are intelligent, inclusive, and responsive to emerging challenges. It also requires a deeper understanding of the relationship between people and technology, recognising that while smarter systems can transform how organisations operate, human creativity, judgement, collaboration, and empathy remain central to meaningful and sustainable progress.

This conference provides an important platform for researchers, academics, practitioners, industry experts, and emerging scholars to exchange knowledge, challenge established perspectives, and explore new pathways for the future. Through the research presented and the discussions that follow, we have the opportunity to connect theory with practice, encourage interdisciplinary thinking, and generate insights that can contribute to stronger organisations and more resilient societies.

As Conference Chair, I extend my sincere appreciation to our distinguished keynote speakers and guest speakers, presenters, participants, reviewers, sponsors, academic partners, and all those who have contributed their expertise and support. I also wish to acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the dedicated organising committee whose commitment, professionalism, and tireless efforts have made this conference possible.

May this conference inspire bold thinking, meaningful dialogue, and lasting collaboration. More importantly, may the knowledge shared here strengthen our collective ability to shape a future where smarter systems, transformative technologies, and purposeful innovation work together to advance management practice and create sustainable value for Sri Lanka and the wider world.

I warmly welcome you all and wish you a highly engaging, intellectually enriching, and successful conference.

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THE IMPACT OF AI DRIVEN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION; SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EXECUTIVE EMPLOYEES OF SELECTED APPERAL COMPANIES IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is increasingly integrated into HR functions globally, such as recruitment and selection, performance evaluation, training and development, succession planning, employee engagement, and workforce analytics (Madanchian, 2024). This shift from traditional HR systems to AI-enabled platforms represents a fundamental change in how organizations attract, develop, manage, and retain talent. AI tools offer benefits such as streamlining administrative processes, reducing human error, improving talent-matching accuracy, personalizing learning pathways, and providing predictive insights that support strategic workforce planning (Venugopol, 2024). These capabilities have made AI an essential component of modern HRM strategies, aiming to improve organizational effectiveness and employee outcomes (Căvescu, 2025).

A major contribution of AI to HRM is its ability to support data-driven decision-making. Predictive analytics, powered by machine learning algorithms, allows organizations to forecast employee turnover, identify attrition risk factors, and implement retention strategies before key talent is lost (Gromov et al., 2018). Globally, companies using AI-driven HR systems have reported improvements in employee satisfaction, fairness perceptions, transparency, and long-term retention (Madanchian, 2024). As labor markets become more competitive and employee expectations evolve, organizations increasingly seek advanced HR technologies to enhance the employee experience and strengthen long-term commitment (Chandrasekara, 2020).

In Sri Lanka, the apparel industry is a key contributor to the national economy, generating substantial export earnings and employment (Wijesiri et al., 2019). The sector is known for its labor-intensive nature and continuous pressure to meet international standards of quality, compliance, and productivity. Executive employees in this industry play strategic roles, including planning, process optimization, organizational coordination, decision-making, and innovation. Consequently, their retention is critical for maintaining a competitive advantage and ensuring organizational stability (Wijesiri et al., 2019).

Despite the importance of executive retention, the Sri Lankan apparel industry faces persistent challenges in this area, such as high turnover rates, skill shortages, limited career advancement opportunities, and workplace pressures (Gromov et al., 2018). Although many apparel companies have implemented HR digitalization initiatives, the adoption of AI-driven HRM systems remains limited and inconsistent across the sector (Wijesiri et al., 2019). While global research suggests that AI can improve retention by enhancing job-person fit, performance monitoring, personalized learning, and workforce analytics, the extent to which these benefits are realized in Sri Lanka's apparel industry remains unclear (Murale Venugopol, 2024).

The gap in empirical research examining the impact of AI-driven HRM practices on executive retention within Sri Lanka's apparel sector highlights a critical need for further investigation. Understanding how AI-driven HR practices influence executives' retention intentions is essential for developing effective strategies that align with global technological advancements and meet industry-specific needs. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of AI-driven HRM practices on executive retention in selected Sri Lankan apparel companies.

Research Problem

Despite the growing global adoption of AI-driven HRM practices and their demonstrated benefits for improving retention, Sri Lankan apparel companies have been slow to adopt and fully utilize the potential of AI within HR functions. Although some organizations have begun using HR analytics, digital platforms, and automated HR tools, there is limited evidence on how these AI-enabled practices affect the retention of executive-level employees. Existing literature primarily focuses on traditional HR strategies, general turnover trends, or job satisfaction factors, but few studies address the specific influence of AI-driven HR interventions on retention outcomes among executives. The lack of localized empirical research creates a knowledge gap for HR practitioners and decision-makers seeking to implement AI for strategic talent management.

Therefore, the research problem is:

What is the impact of AI-driven Human Resource Management practices on employee retention among executive employees in selected apparel companies in Sri Lanka?

Research Questions

- What AI-driven HRM practices are currently implemented in selected Sri Lankan apparel companies?
- How do AI-driven HR functions such as recruitment, performance management, learning and development, and predictive analytics influence employee retention?
- What is the relationship between AI-enabled HRM practices and executive employees' intention to stay in their organizations?
- Which AI-driven HR practices most significantly contribute to improving executive retention?

Research Objectives

General Objective

- To examine the impact of AI-driven Human Resource Management practices on employee retention among executive employees in selected apparel companies in Sri Lanka.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the types of AI-driven HRM practices adopted by selected apparel companies.
- To evaluate the influence of AI-driven HR functions (recruitment, performance management, learning and development, predictive analytics) on employee retention.
- To assess the relationship between AI-enabled HR systems and executives' intention to remain in the organization.
- To determine the AI-driven HRM practices that most effectively enhance executive employee retention.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has increasingly become embedded in Human Resource Management (HRM), transforming traditional practices into data-driven, automated, and predictive systems. Contemporary research indicates that AI enhances HR efficiency by improving recruitment accuracy, supporting continuous performance monitoring, and enabling personalized learning pathways (Venugopol, 2024). The growing use of AI in HR is supported by predictive analytics, which allows organizations to forecast employee turnover and identify attrition risks. Machine learning models, such as decision trees, random forests, and hybrid neural-network systems, have been demonstrated to accurately predict attrition risks, enabling organizations to take proactive measures for retention (Căvescu, 2025).

AI-enabled HR systems can significantly strengthen employee engagement and retention when supported by transparency and ethical data use (Madanchian, 2024). However, challenges such as algorithmic bias and concerns about privacy can undermine employee trust, negatively impacting retention outcomes (Úbeda-García et al., 2025). While global studies show the strategic benefits of AI in managing turnover, the evidence from developing economies, particularly within Sri Lanka's apparel sector, remains sparse. Existing regional research highlights persistent executive-level attrition and underscores the need for analytics-driven retention strategies (Wijesiri et al., 2019). This gap emphasizes the need to explore how AI-driven HRM practices can specifically enhance retention among executive employees in Sri Lanka's apparel sector.

The application of AI in HRM can be examined through various theoretical frameworks, including HR analytics theory, the Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) model. HR analytics theory suggests that the integration of data analytics into HR practices enables evidence-based decision-making, particularly in predicting employee turnover and enhancing retention (Cávescu, 2025). The SET framework posits that employees' perceptions of the fairness and transparency of organizational practices influence their engagement and retention decisions (Madanchian, 2024). Furthermore, the AMO model suggests that an organization's ability to retain employees is contingent upon providing the necessary ability (training), motivation (performance management), and opportunity (career development) for employees to thrive within the organization (Venugopol, 2024).

Hence, despite the research globally, there is a clear gap in empirical studies exploring the impact of AI-driven HRM practices on employee retention in Sri Lanka's apparel sector. Research on HR analytics and AI adoption in Sri Lanka is limited, and even fewer studies have focused on its impact on executive-level retention (Wijesiri et al., 2019). Addressing this gap is crucial for adapting global HRM strategies to the specific needs of Sri Lanka's apparel industry, particularly given the sector's labor-intensive nature and the challenges faced in retaining skilled executive employees.

Methodology

The target population of this study consists of executive-level employees currently employed in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. The research specifically focuses on three leading apparel organisations in the country: MAS Holdings, Brandix, and Hirdaramani. These organisations were selected due to their significant presence, structured HR systems, and established corporate practices within the Sri Lankan apparel sector, making them suitable contexts for examining HR development strategies and employee retention practices.

Primary data were collected directly from respondents using a structured, standardised questionnaire. The use of primary data ensured that the information gathered was specific to the research objectives and reflected the current perceptions and experiences of executives in the selected organisations. Since the research question aims to examine the relationship between HR development strategies and employee retention, a quantitative research approach was adopted. A quantitative design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to measure variables numerically, test relationships statistically, and generalise findings to the broader population. Additionally, prior research in this domain has largely employed quantitative methods, supporting the suitability of this approach.

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This software was utilised to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and the significance of variables. Statistical techniques such as correlation, regression, and reliability analysis can be applied within SPSS to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Given the large population of executives in the apparel industry, a purposive random sampling technique was employed. Initially, purposive sampling was used to specifically target executive-level employees who possess relevant knowledge about HR development strategies and retention practices. Subsequently, respondents within this defined group were selected randomly to reduce bias and improve representativeness. The final sample consisted of 140 executives.

The sample included directors, senior executives, junior executives, and managers from various functional departments at both branch and head office levels. This diversity ensured that multiple organisational perspectives were captured, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of HR development strategies across hierarchical levels. By deliberately focusing on executive employees, the study aimed to gather informed opinions regarding the effectiveness of HRM practices and their influence on employee retention within Sri Lanka's apparel industry.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire with two sections: demographic details (age, gender, marital status, working hours) and variables related to AI-driven HRM practices and employee retention. The study used a quantitative approach, with data analysed through SPSS using regression and correlation analysis, along with descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, skewness, and kurtosis to examine data patterns and distribution.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (≥0.7 considered acceptable), while content validity was ensured through expert review of the questionnaire. Ethical standards were maintained through voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality of responses, anonymised data handling, and adherence to Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical guidelines.

Hypothesis Development and Conceptual Model

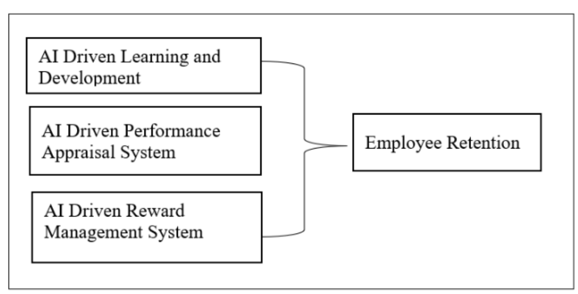

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the Author

Based on the conceptual model the below hypothesis was developed.

H1: *AI-based AI Driven Learning and Development have a significant positive impact on employee retention among executive employees in selected apparel companies in Sri Lanka.*

H2: *AI Driven Performance Appraisal System have a positively influence employee retention among executive employees in the Sri Lankan apparel sector.*

H3: *AI Driven Reward Management System have a significant positive effect on employee retention among executive employees in the apparel industry.*

Research Findings

The measures of central tendency such as mean value and standard deviations of each dimension of HR strategies and employee retention were tabulated in the table 1:

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

The variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability	Conclusion
AI Driven Learning and Development	0.935	0.935 > 0.7	Reliable
AI Driven Performance Appraisal System	0.929	0.929 > 0.7	Reliable
AI Driven Reward Management System	0.879	0.879 > 0.7	Reliable

(Source: SPSS output data)

The study found that all variables, including AI driven Learning and Development, Perfromance Appraisal system and AI driven Reward Management system are reliable and consistent, with AI Driven learning and Development having the highest Cronbach's value of 0.935 and AI driven Reward Manegment system having the lowest but still maintaining a reliability level of 0.862.

The mean values for AI-driven learning and development and AI-driven performance appraisal systems are 3.2571 and 3.1429 respectively. Since these mean values fall between 3.00 and 3.90, they suggest a moderate level of implementation and perception of these AI-supported HR practices among respondents. This implies that employees generally perceive AI-driven learning, development, and performance appraisal practices as having a noticeable influence on employee retention. The corresponding standard deviation values (0.46413 and 0.58237) indicate some variation in how respondents experience these HR strategies, though the variation remains relatively moderate.

In contrast, the mean value for the AI-driven reward management system is comparatively lower at 2.5179, suggesting that respondents perceive reward and compensation practices supported by AI to be less prominent or less effective. The higher standard deviation (0.79603) reflects greater variability in respondents' perceptions regarding these reward strategies.

Additionally, the mean value for employee retention is 3.2946, indicating a moderate level of retention perception among respondents. The relatively low standard deviation (0.42833) suggests that responses regarding employee retention are more consistent compared to other variables. Overall, these findings indicate that while AI-driven learning and performance appraisal practices show moderate influence on retention, AI-driven reward management practices appear less developed and more varied across organisations.

The mean value of employee retention is 3.2949, which indicates a moderate level of employee retention among the respondents, as the value falls within the range of 3.00–3.90. The standard deviation of 0.42833 suggests some variation in respondents' perceptions of employee retention, although the relatively low value indicates a generally consistent response pattern.

To examine the relationship between HR strategies including specifically learning and development strategies, performance appraisal strategies, and reward and compensation strategies and employee retention, a bivariate two-tailed correlation analysis was conducted. Table 2 presents the statistical results of this correlation test, which was performed to identify the strength and direction of the relationships between the dependent variable (employee retention) and the independent HR strategy variables.

The correlation coefficient between learning and development strategies and employee retention is 0.458, indicating a moderate positive relationship between these variables. This suggests that improvements in learning and development initiatives are associated with higher levels of employee retention. Furthermore, the significance level of 0.000 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant, meaning the likelihood that this association occurred by chance is extremely low.

Table 2: Correlation between AI Driven Learning and Development and Employee retention

Variables	**Employee retention**	
AI Driven Learning and Development	Pearson correlation	0.458**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	140

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (Source: SPSS output data)

Pearson Correlation Coefficient of learning & development strategies and employee retention is 0.458 which indicates there is a positive (r>1) correlation exists. Hence H1 hypothesis is accepted.

Correlation coefficient between the performance appraisal strategies and employee retention variables is 0.578 which shows that there is a positive association between performance appraisal strategies and employee

retention, followed by the significance level 0.000.

Table 3: Correlation between AI Driven Performance Appraisal System and Employee retention

Variables	Employee retention	
AI Driven Performance Appraisal System	Pearson correlation	0.578**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	140

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (Source: SPSS output data)

Pearson Correlation Coefficient of performance appraisal strategies and employee retention is 0.578 which indicates there is a positive correlation exists. Hence H2 hypothesis is accepted.

Correlation coefficient between the rewards and compensation strategies and employee retention variables is 0.611 which shows that there is a positive association between rewards and compensation strategies and employee retention, followed by the significance level 0.000

Table 4: Correlation between AI Driven Reward Management System and Employee retention

Variables	Employee retention	
AI Driven Reward Management System	Pearson correlation	0.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	140

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (Source: SPSS output data)

Pearson Correlation Coefficient of rewards and compensation and employee retention is 0.611 which indicates there is a positive (r>1) correlation exists. Hence H3 hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Testing

According to (Malhotra & Dash, 2011) Regression analysis is a powerful and flexible procedure for analyzing associative relationships between a metric dependent Variable and one or more independent Variables. (Malhotra & Dash, 2011). Therefore, regression analysis was used to test hypotheses of the study.

Table 5: Model Summary of Simple linear Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.820a	0.672	0.665	0.24790

a. Predictors: (Constant), learning and development, performance appraisal, rewards and compensation

b. Dependent Variable: Employee retention

(Source: SPSS Output Data)

The model summary is presented in Table 5. According to the results, the R-square value is 0.672, while the adjusted R-square value is 0.665. The adjusted R-square is particularly important as it reflects the explanatory power of the regression model after accounting for the number of variables included. These findings indicate that approximately 67% of the variation in employee retention can be explained by the HR strategies incorporated in the model, suggesting that these strategies have a substantial influence on employee retention outcomes.

Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that AI-driven HRM practices have a significant and positive effect on employee retention among executive employees in Sri Lanka's apparel industry. The results reveal a strong correlation (R = 0.816) and substantial explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.631$), confirming that AI-enabled recruitment, training, performance management, and HR analytics contribute significantly to improving retention rates. All four hypotheses were supported, underscoring the role of AI as a strategic tool for enhancing HR effectiveness and reducing turnover.

For practitioners, this study provides actionable insights, suggesting that integrating AI into HR functions specifically recruitment, training, performance management, and analytics can lead to more informed decision-making, personalized employee development, and data-driven retention strategies. The implications are particularly relevant for companies in Sri Lanka's apparel sector seeking to leverage technology for improving HR outcomes. It is clear that AI is not just a trend but a vital investment in driving long-term HR efficiency and retention.

However, this study recognizes its limitations, particularly in the scope of its sample and its focus on executive employees. Future research should explore how AI-driven HR practices impact retention across different employee levels, industries, and cultural contexts. Moreover, examining mediating or moderating factors, such as organizational culture or leadership styles, could deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics between AI and employee retention.

The unique contribution of this study lies in its empirical evidence on the application of AI in HRM practices in a developing country context like Sri Lanka, where such research is scarce. By offering this insight, it lays the foundation for future studies to further refine AI-HRM models and expand the understanding of AI's potential in the global HR landscape.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), AI-based Human Resource Management, Employee Retention, Executive employee

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EXPLORING GENDERED PATTERNS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT USING A MIXED-METHOD APPROACH IN A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

Higher education in Sri Lanka is undergoing rapid transformation as institutions attempt to enhance academic quality and create more inclusive learning environments (Fernando, 2021). Although student engagement is widely recognised as a key determinant of motivation, learning behaviours and academic success (Kahu & Nelson, 2018), there is limited empirical research examining how gender shapes engagement within Sri Lanka's private higher education sector. Existing studies acknowledge that male and female students may experience learning environments differently due to social expectations, institutional culture and individual factors (Devlin & Samarawickrama, 2021). Yet, little is known about whether these differences translate into measurable variations in academic engagement in private HEIs. This absence of local evidence represents a significant research gap, particularly as private institutions continue to expand and diversify their student populations. Therefore, this study investigates gendered patterns of academic engagement and examines how institutional support mechanisms influence engagement across student groups.

Research Questions

1. Do male and female students differ in their levels of academic engagement?

2. How does institutional support influence students' academic engagement?

3. What institutional factors contribute to enhancing equitable academic engagement across genders?

Research Objectives

- To compare male and female students' levels of academic engagement.
- To examine how institutional support mechanisms influence academic engagement.

• To identify institutional factors that can enhance equitable academic engagement across genders.

Literature Review

Academic engagement is recognised as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions that collectively influence student performance and persistence (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). International research consistently demonstrates that engaged students achieve stronger academic outcomes and exhibit higher levels of motivation and connectedness (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). However, understanding engagement requires examining contextual influences such as gender, social norms and institutional practices (Devlin & Samarawickrama, 2021).

Regional studies show that South Asian learners often experience gendered expectations that shape how they participate in academic environments (Perera & Wijeratne, 2020; Jayawardena, 2019). In Sri Lanka specifically, research indicates that female students tend to report stronger academic commitment but may experience participation barriers linked to cultural expectations, classroom dynamics and institutional structures (Egodawatte & Gunawardena, 2017). Conversely, male students in Sri Lankan HEIs have been found to show lower academic persistence and engagement due to social pressures and work–study balance challenges (Karunathilake, 2021). Despite these insights, empirical evidence on gendered engagement within the expanding private higher education sector remains limited, indicating a need for context-specific investigation.

Institutional support has been widely recognised as a critical determinant of engagement. Supportive teaching practices, access to resources, academic guidance and transparent institutional policies can strengthen students' willingness and capacity to participate meaningfully (Trowler, 2010). Sri Lankan studies similarly highlight that learner support systems, lecturer approachability and digital resource accessibility significantly shape engagement in private HEIs (Dissanayake & Fonseka, 2022). However, little research has examined how institutional support interacts with gender to influence engagement, underscoring the relevance of the present study.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine gendered patterns of academic engagement and the influence of institutional support in a private higher education institution in Sri Lanka. The quantitative component consisted of a cross-sectional survey administered to a simple random sample of 50 undergraduate students from multiple programmes and years of study. The structured questionnaire contained Likert-scale items measuring academic engagement and institutional support, adapted from established instruments used in prior studies (Fredricks et al., 2004; Trowler, 2010). Reliability analysis indicated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values of $\alpha = 0.909$ for academic engagement and $\alpha = 0.956$ for institutional support, confirming robust measurement coherence.

To address the third objective, the study incorporated a qualitative component consisting of open-ended questions. These responses were examined using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of key institutional factors that enhance equitable academic engagement across genders. Integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional mechanisms influencing student engagement.

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, provided digital informed consent, and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were collected, and participation was entirely voluntary, ensuring adherence to institutional ethical guidelines and safeguarding student rights.

Research Findings

The study investigated gendered patterns of academic engagement and the role of institutional support using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative descriptive analysis indicated that students reported moderately high academic engagement ($M \approx 3.92$, $SD \approx 0.78$) and strong institutional support ($M \approx 4.06$, $SD \approx 0.90$), suggesting a generally positive learning environment.

RQ1: Do male and female students differ in their levels of academic engagement?

An independent-samples t-test revealed **no statistically significant difference** in engagement between male and female students ($t \approx -0.49$, $p > .05$). Although females ($M \approx 3.98$) reported slightly higher engagement than males ($M \approx 3.86$), the gap was minimal.

H1 is not accepted, indicating that both genders engage academically at comparable levels.

RQ2: How does institutional support influence students' academic engagement?

Correlation analysis showed a **strong positive relationship** between institutional support and academic engagement ($r \approx .81$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis confirmed institutional support as a **significant predictor**, explaining **66% of the variance** in engagement ($R^2 \approx .66$). **H2 is supported**, demonstrating that supportive environments substantially enhance academic involvement.

RQ3: What institutional factors contribute to enhancing equitable academic engagement across genders?

Open-ended responses were analysed thematically to identify institutional factors that strengthen equitable academic engagement across genders. Three key themes emerged:

1.Lecturer Approachability and Guidance
Students highlighted that timely feedback, supportive communication and lecturer availability increase confidence and motivation across both genders.

2.Access to Learning Resources
Respondents emphasised the need for well-organised LMS platforms, library resources and clear academic materials, which facilitate equal participation.

3.Inclusive Academic Practices
Students noted that fair treatment, respectful classroom interactions and transparent assessment practices promote a sense of belonging for all learners.

Overall, the qualitative themes extend the quantitative results by demonstrating how institutional mechanisms, particularly supportiveness, resource accessibility and inclusive practices actively contribute to equitable academic engagement for male and female students.

Conclusion and Implications

This mixed-methods study explored gendered patterns of academic engagement and the influence of institutional support within a private higher education institution in Sri Lanka. The findings show that gender does not significantly predict engagement, suggesting that male and female students participate at comparable levels in environments where institutional support is strong. Institutional support emerged as a key determinant of engagement, while qualitative insights highlighted lecturer approachability, access to resources and inclusive academic practices as crucial mechanisms that promote equitable engagement across genders. These findings contribute to the limited body of Sri Lankan private higher education literature by providing empirical evidence on how institutional structures, rather than demographic characteristics, shape student engagement.

A limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size from a single institution, which may restrict the generalisability of the results. Future research may expand the scope across multiple private HEIs or adopt longitudinal designs to better understand how engagement patterns evolve over time. Overall, the study underscores the importance of strengthening institutional support systems to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments in Sri Lanka's growing private higher education sector.

Keywords

Academic Engagement; Gender Differences; Institutional Support; Higher Education; Student Inclusivity

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ADAPTIVE INCLUSIVE INTERIOR DESIGN SOLUTIONS FOR ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY AND FOR COLOUR-BLIND INDIVIDUALS

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UNISTE

Introduction

Colour is an essential element of interior design, influencing emotions and spatial functionality. Individuals with colour vision deficiency (CVD), affecting approximately 8% of men and 0.5% of women, face challenges in perceiving colour, which complicates their experience of designed environments. (Kaur, 2024)The most prevalent forms of CVD include red-green deficiencies (deuteranopia and protanopia), while blue-yellow deficiency (tritanopia) and total colour-blindness (monochromacy) further limit their visual perceptions, particularly in contexts where colour is vital for organization and communication. (Access, 2023)

Research Problem

The constraints faced by individuals with color vision deficiency (CVD) are generally undervalued, causing them problems to interact with the environment, impacting their emotional connection, accessibility, and usability. The majority of the interior design suggestions currently available fail to take color deficiencies into account, hindering the creation of truly inclusive environments.

Research Questions

1. What are the most significant challenges faced by color-blind individuals in interior environments?

2. How can design elements such as contrast, texture, lighting, and patterns improve accessibility for color-blind users?

3. To what extent do existing interior spaces accommodate color-blind individuals?

4. How can inclusive interior design practices enhance overall user experience and functionality

Aim:

To develop adaptive and inclusive interior design solutions that address the specific challenges faced by color-blind individuals while maintaining aesthetic integrity.

Objectives:

1. To identify the key challenges faced by color-blind individuals in navigating and interacting with interior spaces.

2. To analyze existing interior spaces for their inclusivity and adaptability to color vision deficiencies.

3. To propose strategies and design principles that enhance accessibility and inclusivity.

Literature Review

Designing inclusive interiors for individuals with colour vision deficiency (CVD) addresses unique challenges and opportunities. CVD affects a significant proportion of the population, creating barriers in colour-centric environments (Birch, 2012). This research develops a framework focusing on alternatives to colour, such as texture, shape, and contrast (Elliot & Maier, 2014). The methodology includes literature reviews, case studies, expert interviews, and design simulations, revealing that texture and shape significantly aid navigation and enhance user experience (Preiser & Korydon, 2010). The study emphasizes a shift towards universal design principles that prioritize accessibility, illustrating that non-colour elements in interior design can create both functional and visually appealing spaces (Imrie & Hall, 2001)

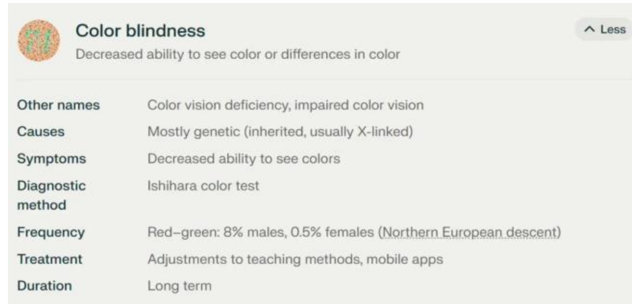

Figure 1:color Blindness

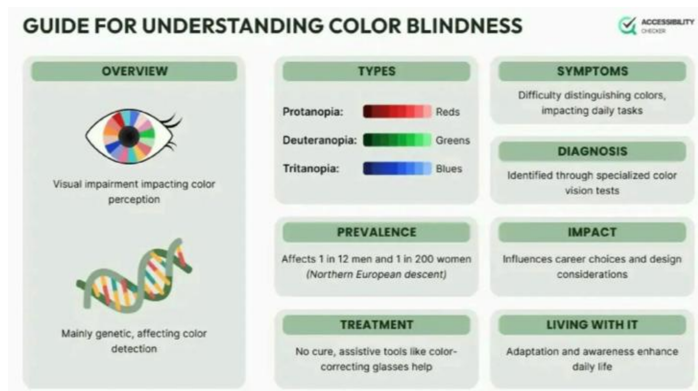

Figure 2 : Guide for Understand Color Blindness

Colour blind type	*Cause*	*Effect*
Monochromacy	No cones or only one type exist	Inability to see any colours (see the world in grey shades)
Dichromacy	One cone type is missing, three types: 1. Protanopia: L-cones are missing 2. Deuteranopia: M-cones are missing 3. Tritanopia: S-cones are missing	Inability to see the colour corresponding to the missed cone type. Inability to see red colour (Red Blind) Inability to see green colour (Green Blind) Inability to see blue colour (Blue Blind)
Anomalous Trichromacy	All cone types exist, but they are not aligned, three types: 1. Protanomaly: L-cones are not aligned 2. Deuteronomy: M-cones are not aligned. 3. Tritanomaly :S-cones are not aligned	Reduction in the sensitivity to a particular colour Less sensitivity to red colour (Red week) Less sensitivity to green colour (Green week) Less sensitivity to blue colour (Blue week)

Table 1: Colour Blind Types

Colour they can see

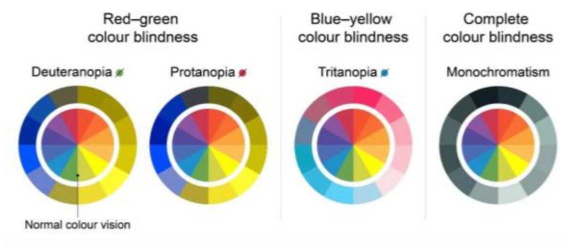

Figure 3:The types of colours individuals with colour blindness can see depend on the specific type of colour vision deficiency they have

Understanding the Challenge

Colorblind individuals perceive the world differently, from red-green and blue-yellow color blindness to monochromacy. The designers must adapt by rethinking color schemes and prioritizing texture, shape, and functionality. Tate's experience of designing a sunroom for a red-green colorblind client highlights the need to shift perceptions and build shared visions without color. (Access, 2023)

Methodology

The data collection for this research involved various methods: a literature review of academic sources on colour-blind accessibility and inclusive design principles; analysis of case studies from notable designers addressing colour-blind clients; semi-structured interviews with interior

designers, colour consultants, and colour-blind individuals to discuss challenges and strategies; and a questionnaire survey targeting colour-blind individuals, designers, and experts, capturing user preferences and design challenges. A total of 70 respondents were involved, including colour-blind individuals, architects, and knowledgeable participants, ensuring diverse perspectives. Parameters such as awareness of colour blindness, design challenges, solutions for inclusivity, effectiveness of existing designs, and future recommendations were established to guide data collection. The purposive sampling method was employed, with surveys administered online and in-person to maximize accessibility, facilitating a comprehensive analysis aimed at improving interior design for colour-blind individuals.

Research Findings

The visual observation analysis examines design elements in various case study environments, particularly for non-color information such as texture, shape, contrast, and lighting, to enhance colorblind user accessibility. Three case studies were selected:

1. Asiri Hospital Kandy Lobby Area: Placing emphasis on inclusiveness, the lobby employs pathway differentiation via texture, high contrasts for legibility, and refraining from the use of red and green hues on signs to assist colourblind users.

2. Makumbura Multimodal Transport Hub, Kottawa: This transport hub meets the need for good wayfinding through signage motifs and light contrast, crucial to a broad variety of users.

3. Cinnamon Life Banquet Hall: This area prioritizes aesthetics and ambiance while welcoming non-color-dependent design aspects, maintaining sophistication without losing access.

These results emphasize the ways in which thoughtful design promotes navigation by color vision-impaired individuals.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explores adaptive interior design solutions directed towards functional, accessible, and aesthetic approaches for people with color vision deficiency (CVD). The study focuses on designers' consideration of non-color cues such as texture, shape, and contrast to achieve optimum accessibility and aesthetics. The study revealed that the majority of contemporary interior designs fail to consider the requirements of color-blind people, particularly in safety, color-coded systems, and navigation. Applying the principles of inclusive design, the study aimed to identify viable solutions to close this gap. The study ascertained that 64.8% of the respondents found red-green color schemes difficult to use, while 78.9% had CVD or knew someone with CVD. High contrast design schemes, shape-based navigation cues, and neutral lighting make environments more usable for people with CVD. The paper concludes by demanding a paradigm shift in interior design practice and education, with awareness being the first step, followed by revision of design guidelines and enabling collaboration with people with CVD. Inclusive design solutions prioritize not only improving the lives of colour-blind people but also pushing the limits of innovative design.

Keywords: Inclusive design, Colour vision deficiency, Accessibility, High-contrast design

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INVESTIGATING THE EFFICIENCY OF RECRUITMENT PROCESS: REDUCINGDELAYS IN FILLING CRITICAL ROLES - WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SS IT GROUP OF COMPANIES IN SRI LANKA

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UNISTEM[1]

Introduction

The inefficiencies in the recruitment process have created challenges in hiring for critical roles such as, cybersecurity, data science and software development in Sri Lanka's growing IT sector (Wikipedia, 2025; Jayanandana & Jayathilaka, 2023). The SS IT group of companies are having continuous delays in filling these critical roles, which has an adverse effect on project timelines, operational effectiveness, and the ability to innovate. In this setting, recruitment inefficiencies have become a substantial problem for both corporate executives and human resource experts in this SS IT group of companies.

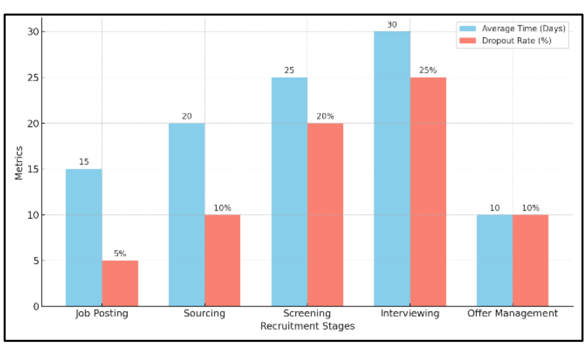

Figure 1: The average time and candidate dropout rates across key recruitment stages in the SS IT Group of Companies, Sri Lanka

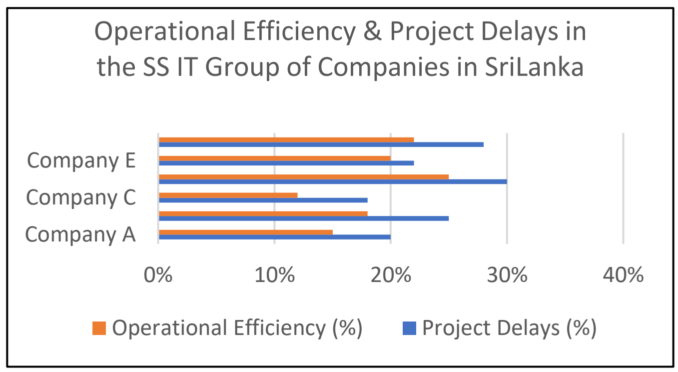

Figure 2: Operational efficiency and Project delays in SS IT Group of Companies, Sri Lanka

Thus, there is an urgent need to investigate the root causes of recruitment inefficiencies in the SS IT group of companies, and develop strategic approaches to reduce delays. In addition to examining how technology, employer branding, and succession planning might enhance the industry's recruiting practices, this study attempts to pinpoint the main obstacles to prompt hiring. In the end, fixing these inefficiencies will enable organizations to better meet their talent needs and maintain a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving industry.

Research Objectives:

1) To investigate the impact of technology in recruitment on enhancing recruitment process efficiency.

2) To investigate the impact of employer branding in improving recruitment process efficiency.

3) To investigate the impact of succession planning on recruitment process efficiency.

Literature Review

Recruitment efficiency in Sri Lanka's IT sector hinges on balancing speed, cost, and quality in filling highly specialized roles while adapting to global trends (Sethunga & Perera, 2018). While hiring processes have traditionally been slow and manual, the focus has now shifted toward strategic recruitment and the increased use of technology. More recently, the focus on new technology in recruitment practices is in line with the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, which states that the firm has a competitive advantage if it acquires superior human capital which is scarce and difficult to replicate (Seitz, 2024). However, there are a number of infrastructure challenges, such as poor internet access, limited funds, and a lack of digital literacy among HR managers, that impede the effective technological integration of recruitment practices in Sri Lanka (Hashtag Generation, 2023: Jayananda and Jayathilaka, 2023).

Successfully enhancing recruitment outcomes involves employer branding and succession planning. The Social Exchange Theory and Spence's signaling Theory describe how strong employer brands build loyalty and attract talent by communicating positive organizational values (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Nonetheless, struggling IT firms in Sri Lanka, particularly smaller ones, face resource constraints and find it difficult to compete with Sri Lankan multinational companies like Virtusa and WSO2 (Jayanandana & Jayathilaka, 2023). On the other hand, succession planning focuses on the alleviation of skills gaps as well as turnover, with smaller firms still being constrained by financial and infrastructural gaps (Ratnayake & Sridharan, 2024). This is further supported by Human Capital Theory which explains the increased emphasis on succession planning (LeCounte, Prieto and Phipps, 2017). While the need for efficient hiring continues to increase in the IT sector in Sri Lanka, studies to date remain general in nature, addressing more general recruitment issues as opposed to the recruitment issues that are unique to the industry. This is the gap that the proposed research seeks to fill by studying recruitment inefficiencies and suggesting ways to increase the efficiency of hiring in Sri Lanka's IT sector.

Methodology

The research design for this study follows a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including; surveys and interviews. For this study, the sample design was based on the total population of 220 employees across six subsidiary companies, as calculated using the Morgan table, which recommended a sample size of 140 participants (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The sample included the key people who take part in recruitment like the Hiring Managers, Recruiting Staff, HR Staff, and the Technical Department Heads, as they were directly involved in the hiring process. The research was done using the simple random sampling technique which is a type of probability sampling, which ensured that everyone in the target population was given a chance of being chosen.

Within this research, primary data was gathered using structured surveys among HR employees and the heads of the technical departments in specific IT companies. The surveys were designed to gather firsthand insights into the recruitment process and focusing on areas such as technology usage, employer branding, succession planning, and overall recruitment process efficiency. Also, demographic data was captured that included gender, age, level of education attained, and service period in order to analyze the impact of these factors on recruitment. Secondary information is derived from the existing available literature including; academic journals, books, industry and company reports, and even the case studies of the organization focusing on the recruitment procedure, particularly in the case of IT. The research was conducted through the use of SPSS and Excel, which included descriptive statistics and correlation and regression analysis to determine and assess of influence of certain variables.

Research Findings

4.1) Key Finding 1 - Investigate the impact of technology in recruitment on enhancing recruitment process efficiency:

The findings of this research highlight technology as a pivotal factor in enhancing recruitment efficiency within the SS IT Group of Companies. The strong positive correlation (0.960) and regression results attributing 92% of recruitment efficiency to technological adoption underscore its transformative potential. The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory provides a theoretical framework for analyzing these results since it argues that a competitive advantage is gained and sustained through the firm's resources, which includes possessing systems with exceptional technology (Seitz, 2024). These results indicate that technology, when strategically implemented as a valuable resource under the RBV framework, is indispensable for addressing inefficiencies in recruitment and fostering competitive advantage in this IT Group of companies in the fast-paced IT sector.

4.2) Key Finding 2 - Investigate the impact of employer branding in improving recruitment process efficiency:

The research identifies employer branding as a critical determinant of recruitment efficiency in this SS IT Group of Companies. A high positive correlation (0.975) and regression analysis revealing 95% contribution highlight its influence in attracting and retaining talent. Signaling Theory provides a theoretical underpinning for these findings, as it explains how organizations send positive signals about their values, culture, and opportunities to attract top talent (Vinayak, Khan and Jain, 2017). This aligns with studies suggesting that employer branding must adapt to evolving industry trends and workforce expectation. Overall, the findings reaffirm the pivotal role of employer branding in driving recruitment efficiency of this IT Group of Companies, where signaling a strong organizational value proposition is essential.

4.3) Key Finding 3 - Investigate the impact of succession planning on recruitment process efficiency:

The research highlights succession planning as a pivotal factor in improving recruitment efficiency within the SS IT Group of Companies. The correlation value of 0.980 and regression results attributing 96% of recruitment efficiency to succession planning demonstrate its strong influence. Human Capital Theory provides a theoretical framework for these findings, emphasizing that investments in employee development, such as succession planning, enhance organizational capabilities and performance (LeCounte, Prieto and Phipps, 2017). Additionally, the need for ongoing skills development and leadership training is critical to sustaining its benefits. These findings, consistent with existing literature and grounded in Human Capital Theory, underscore succession planning as an indispensable component of recruitment efficiency in this IT Group of Companies.

Conclusion, Implications & Recommendations

In conclusion, this study offers an IT solution to a real-world issue for the mentioned IT group of companies faced; protracted delays in hiring critical roles like data science and cybersecurity. The study's practical goal is to offer practical insights and tactics that help improve overall organizational efficiency, shorten time-to-hire, and expedite recruitment procedures and also the research will help hiring managers, HR experts, and IT technical leads to better attract and retain top talent in a highly competitive market by identifying inefficiencies and suggesting solutions. Theoretically, this research contributes to the academic discourse on recruitment efficiency by exploring its under-researched aspects in the context of a developing country's IT industry.

This research provides actionable recommendations to enhance recruitment practices within the SS IT Group of Companies. In terms of technology, leveraging AI-driven skill mapping, predictive hiring, and blockchain credentialing can optimize recruitment efficiency while reducing qualification fraud. Implementing collaborative platforms like LinkedIn Talent Hub and Smart Recruiters expands the talent pool and streamlines hiring. For employer branding, hosting hackathons and gamified coding challenges can attract top talent, while adopting advanced recruitment CRM systems, supported by recruiter training, enhances candidate engagement and reduces hiring dropout rates. Regarding succession planning, micro-internships, proactive reskilling, and upskilling initiatives help build a strong internal talent pipeline, minimizing reliance on external hiring. Collectively, these strategic measures align with industry demands and support long-term organizational success.

The findings reveal that the integration of advanced technologies, the strengthening of employer branding, and the establishment of robust succession planning are pivotal in addressing delays in filling critical roles. This group of IT organizations may streamline their recruitment processes by embracing these elements to ensuring faster response times to industry demands while attracting top-tier candidates for specialized roles. As the IT sector continues to evolve, the ability to implement these strategies will enable this IT Group of companies to gain a competitive edge, fostering a more agile and effective recruitment ecosystem.

Keywords
Recruitment efficiency, IT group of companies, Use of technology, Employer branding, Succession planning, Strategic solutions

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NEXT-GENERATION LEADERSHIP: INTEGRATING ETHICS, SUSTAINABILITY, AND DIGITAL EXCELLENCE

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Introduction

Contemporary management thinking is undergoing a fundamental transformation driven by digital innovation, sustainability imperatives, and ethical accountability. While global studies emphasize the need for purpose-driven leadership, there remains a limited understanding of how these principles are operationalized within emerging economies such as Sri Lanka. The research gap lies in the absence of integrative models that concurrently address ethical governance, digital transformation, and sustainable value creation in organizational contexts.

This study, therefore, examines how Sri Lankan managers and executives conceptualize and practice "Next-Generation Leadership," focusing on the integration of ethics, sustainability, and digital excellence. The objectives are:

(1) to identify core competencies required for ethical and sustainable management in digital contexts;

(2) to analyze how digital transformation influences ethical decision-making and sustainability outcomes; and

(3) to propose a holistic framework for cultivating next-generation leaders capable of driving organizational transformation responsibly.

Literature Review

Theoretical foundations draw upon the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997) and Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasize ethical and sustainable value creation. Recent scholarship expands this discourse by linking digital transformation with corporate sustainability (George et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2023). Studies highlight that artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, and blockchain can improve transparency and accountability, yet they raise new ethical dilemmas (Floridi & Cowls, 2022).

Leadership research from 2020–2024 underscores the need for "digital ethics competencies” (Deloitte, 2022; PwC, 2023) and “sustainable adaptive leadership” (Kane et al., 2021). However, empirical gaps persist particularly within South Asian contexts regarding how leaders align digital agility with moral responsibility. This study bridges that gap by proposing an integrated ethical sustainability digital framework tailored to Sri Lankan organizations.

Methodology

A mixed-methods design was adopted to ensure comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data were collected via a structured questionnaire distributed to 150 mid-level and senior managers across Sri Lanka’s technology, manufacturing, and service sectors, selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse organizational experiences. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis to explore relationships among ethical leadership, digital practices, and sustainability performance.

Complementing this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 senior executives to explore in-depth perceptions of ethical dilemmas, sustainability integration, and digital adaptation. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2019) six-phase model, ensuring thematic saturation and credibility. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Peradeniya Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Research Findings

Three dominant themes emerged:

- Ethical Digitalization: Managers integrating ethical guidelines into AI, automation, and data systems reported higher stakeholder trust and reduced reputational risk.
- Adaptive and Empathic Leadership: Leaders demonstrating emotional intelligence and flexibility were more effective in balancing innovation with environmental and social responsibility.
- Cultural Transformation: Building an inclusive, ethically aware culture proved pivotal for embedding sustainability within organizational strategy.

Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between ethical leadership and perceived organizational sustainability. Notably, 72% of participants identified digital literacy coupled with ethical mindfulness as essential competencies for future leadership. Qualitative insights suggest that firms aligning technological growth with sustainability goals demonstrate greater long-term resilience.

Conclusion and Implications

This study extends theoretical understanding by integrating ethical theory, sustainability principles, and digital leadership into a unified "Next-Gen Leadership" model relevant to developing economies. Practically, it recommends embedding ethical AI policies, sustainability metrics, and digital ethics training within leadership development programs.

For policymakers, the findings emphasize the need to promote cross-disciplinary education that merges ethics, sustainability, and technology management. The study's limitations include its focus on Sri Lankan industries, suggesting that future research should adopt comparative cross-country analyses and longitudinal designs to validate the proposed model globally.

Ultimately, Next-Generation Leadership transcends profit-oriented management it embodies purpose-driven stewardship grounded in ethical consciousness, technological fluency, and sustainable impact.

Keywords

Ethical Leadership, Digital Transformation, Sustainability, Adaptive Management, Sri Lankan Organizations

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THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHO-ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON EMOTIONAL BURNOUT AMONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY STAFF IN SRI-LANKA

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2UNISTEM

Introduction

Emotional burnout, characterized by exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced efficacy is a critical issue in global academia with significant implications for faculty well-being and institutional quality. (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Within Sri Lanka's rapidly expanding private university sector, faculty face unique psycho-environmental stressors, including excessive workload, hierarchical structures, limited autonomy, and inadequate institutional support. The consequences are severe, leading to diminished teaching quality, high faculty turnover, and psychological distress, which collectively threaten institutional sustainability and educational outcomes (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Despite extensive burnout research is abundant in Western and public university contexts, a critical gap exists in understanding these dynamics within Sri Lanka's distinct private higher education landscape, which is characterized by market-driven pressures and specific socio-cultural factors. The overarching objective of this study is to address the gap by investigating the influence of key psycho-environmental factors—job autonomy, social support, and work-life balance—on emotional burnout levels among private university faculty. By identifying these specific drivers, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights to inform targeted interventions and policies, ultimately fostering a healthier academic work environment and enhancing educational quality in this unique setting.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posit that burnout results from an imbalance between factors from high demands and depleted resources. Empirical research consistently identifies three critical psycho-environmental resources to buffer against emotional burnout in academia.

Job autonomy informed by Self-Determination Theory, which fosters a sense of control and enhanced motivation to reduce emotional exhaustion (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Social support explained by the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis, which provides emotional and instrumental aid that help faculty cope with stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Work-life balance elucidated by Spillover Theory, which ensures adequate recovery from work stress as vital requirement (Staines, 1980).

While global studies confirm these factors mitigate burnout, their interplay within Sri Lanka's private university sector is critically underexplored. Local research indicates that unique commercial pressures, hierarchical structures, and collectivist cultural norms intensify this context (Rajapakse et al., 2019; Perera & Panditharathna, 2022) likely modulate these established interplayed relationships, creating a distinct research gap in understanding how the established interplay between these psycho-environmental factors and burnout manifests within localized setting.

Therefore, this study contextualizes these global theories to the Sri Lankan setting, hypothesizing that lower levels of job autonomy, social support, and work-life balance will be significantly associated with higher emotional burnout among faculty in Sri Lankan private universities.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design grounded in a positivist philosophy to examine the relationships between psycho-environmental factors and emotional burnout (Saunders et al., 2019). Data were collected over a four-week period via a structured online questionnaire from faculty members across private universities in Sri Lanka. A combined purposive and snowball sampling technique was employed in the study, yielding a final sample of 150 participants to ensure diverse representation. The survey utilized validated scales, including the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) for emotional burnout (dependent variable) and adapted scales of established measures for job autonomy, social support, and work-life balance (independent variables) (Schaufeli et al., 2019). All procedures received formal ethical clearance, ensuring participant confidentiality and informed consent. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, employing reliability tests, correlation, and regression analyses to test the study's hypotheses.

Research Findings

The analysis of 150 valid responses revealed significant levels of emotional burnout ($M=3.66$, $SD=0.96$) among faculty in Sri Lankan private universities, indicating a widespread well-being crisis. Critically, all three hypothesized psycho-environmental factors were confirmed as significant predictors. Descriptive statistics indicated concerningly low levels of the protective resources: job autonomy ($M=2.66$), social support ($M=2.62$), and work-life balance ($M=2.55$), suggesting a deficit in the very factors needed to mitigate burnout.

Pearson correlation analyses demonstrated statistically significant ($p < .001$) negative relationships between each independent variable and emotional burnout. The strongest correlations were observed for job autonomy ($r = -0.598$) and work-life balance ($r = -0.590$). This indicates that a lack of control over work processes and an inability to disconnect from job demands are particularly potent drivers of exhaustion. Social support also showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.551$), underscoring that insufficient collegial and institutional backing leaves faculty more vulnerable to emotional depletion.

Simple linear regression analyses quantified these impacts. Job autonomy accounted for 35.8% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .358$, $\beta = -0.587$, $p < .001$), confirming that restricted decision-making authority is a primary contributor to faculty distress. Work-life balance explained 34.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .348$, $\beta = -0.599$, $p < .001$), highlighting how the spillover of work demands into personal life severely depletes emotional resources. Social support predicted 30.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .304$, $\beta = -0.545$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that a lack of a supportive professional network significantly exacerbates burnout symptoms.

Consequently, all three null hypotheses were rejected. The findings conclusively show that deficits in job autonomy, social support, and work-life balance are key, interrelated contributors to emotional burnout in this context (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), necessitating urgent institutional interventions targeted at these specific areas.

Conclusion and Implications

This study conclusively demonstrates that job autonomy, social support, and work-life balance are significant, negative predictors of emotional burnout among faculty in Sri Lankan private universities. The findings validate the application of the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) in this unique context, confirming that deficits in these psycho-environmental resources critically contribute to burnout. A key conclusion is the primacy of work-life balance, whose systemic role in preventing role conflict and chronic exhaustion makes it the most influential protective factor.

Practically, the results provide clear, evidence-based guidance for institutional intervention. University administrators are urged to prioritize work-life balance through flexible work arrangements and family-supportive policies, while simultaneously fostering job autonomy and strengthening collegial support networks (Kinman & Wray, 2018). A primary limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design, which precludes definitive causal inferences. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track burnout trajectories and investigate the role of additional factors, such as workload intensity and precarious employment, to develop a more comprehensive model of faculty well-being in developing higher education contexts.

Keywords

Emotional Burnout (EB), Job Autonomy (JA), Social Support (SS), Work-Life Balance (WLB), faculty well-being

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FROM COUNSELLING MRICO- SKILLS TO ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE: A COUNSELLING INFORMED FRAMEWORK FOR WORKPLACE WELLBEING IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

Workplace psychological wellbeing has become a critical organisational concern, influencing employee performance, retention, and public health outcomes. However, most wellbeing initiatives remain individual oriented and disconnected from organisational systems. Evidence demonstrates that factors such as workload, role clarity, and supportive leadership are key determinants of wellbeing, and that sustainable impact manifests only when psychological principles are Integrated in the organisational culture. In Sri Lanka, this issue has gained urgency amid expeditious economic transitions, high job stress, and limited access to professional counselling services. Existing wellbeing programmes in corporate and public sectors often overlook the potential of counselling principles as practical tools for fostering empathy, communication, and trust within the workplace. This conceptual gap highlights the need for an integrated approach that connects counselling practice with organisational advancement and human resource management. Accordingly, this study addresses the question; How can counselling principles be intentionally embedded within organisational practices to strengthen employee wellbeing?

The objective is to propose a counselling-informed conceptual framework that positions micro-skills such as active listening, empathy, validation, brief problem-solving, and effective referral as integral components of managerial and HR interventions.

Literature Review

Prior research demonstrates that workplace counselling and structured psychosocial interventions can reduce distress and absenteeism when supported by strong organisational systems (McLeod, 2010; De

Neve et al., 2020). Yet, few HR frameworks explicitly operationalise counselling skills within wellbeing strategies (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024).

Theoretical perspectives explain how these principles enhance wellbeing. Psychological Empowerment Theory (Spreitzer, 1995) suggests that employees thrive when they experience meaning, competence, and autonomy, all of which can be reinforced through empathetic, supportive communicati on. Perceived Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) similarly posits that employees who feel valued show greater wellbeing and commitment an effect counselling-informed leadership can strengthen.

Empirical studies indicate that the success of wellbeing interventions depends on contextual enablers such as managerial training and policy alignment (Hassard, Wong & Wang, 2022). However, gaps persist in explaining how counselling techniques function as mediators of empowerment and support within organisations, and in providing frameworks that link these skills with HR systems. Addressing these gaps, the present paper proposes a conceptual framework connecting counselling inputs, psychological mediators, and organisational wellbeing outcomes.

Methodology

This study adopts a Structured Narrative Synthesis approach to develop a conceptual framework linking counselling principles to workplace wellbeing. As a conceptual inquiry, it integrates and interprets existing theoretical and empirical evidence from counselling psychology, organisational behaviour, and human resource management, focusing on literature published between 2010 and 2025. Literature was purposively selected based on relevance, credibility, recency, and applicability to organisational contexts comparable to Sri Lanka. The synthesis followed three stages:

(1) Identifying recurring constructs such as perceived organisational support and empowerment;

(2) Comparing mechanisms across disciplines;

(3) Developing a mid-range conceptual model representing relationships among counselling inputs, psychological mediators, and wellbeing outcomes.

Research Findings

The synthesis revealed four interrelated themes.

(1) Counselling principles as behavioural inputs: skills such as empathy, active listening, validation, and brief problem solving strengthen psychological safety and perceived organisational support.

(2) Mediating processes: counselling informed practices enhance coping self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and empowerment, leading to reduced stress and absenteeism.

(3) Organisational enablers: sustainable wellbeing depends on managerial training, integration into HR systems, workload redesign, and monitoring mechanisms.

(4) Cultural adaptation: contextual sensitivity to power distance and emotional norms is essential for effective implementation.

The proposed Counselling-Informed Wellbeing Framework conceptualises these relationships,positioning organisational enablers as the sustaining context for counselling-informed leadership.

Figure 1, This model conceptualises how counselling principles foster employee wellbeing through psychological mediators, contingent upon enabling organisational systems and contextual adaptation.

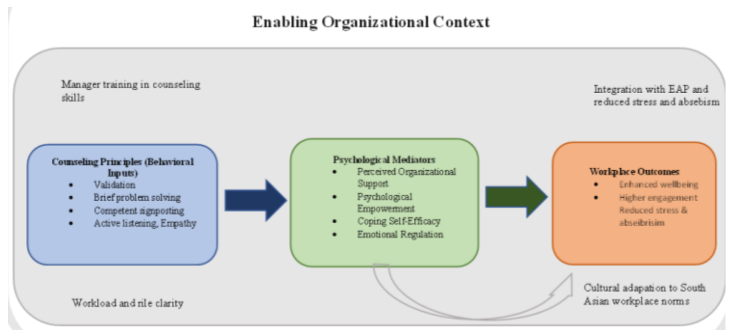

Figure 4:Counseling informed framework for workplace

Conclusion and Implications

The study contributes a conceptual framework that connects counselling micro-skills to organisational wellbeing through mediators such as empowerment and perceived support. It advances theory by linking counselling psychology with organisational behaviour and provides practical guidance for embedding counselling-informed leadership and referral mechanisms within HR systems. While limited by the absence of empirical validation, the model offers testable propositions for future mixed-method research and supports the design of psychologically informed, culturally adaptive workplaces in Sri Lanka and broader South Asian contexts

Keywords

Counselling-informed leadership, Employee wellbeing, psychological empowerment, Organisational support, Sri Lanka

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MINDFULNESS IN PUBLIC SECTOR WORKSPACES: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF MINDFUL LEADERSHIP AND WELL-BEING AMONG GOVERNMENT EMPLOYERS IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

In contemporary organizational settings, mindfulness has evolved beyond its spiritual and meditative origins to become an evidence-based psychological and managerial approach for enhancing professional performance, emotional resilience, and ethical awareness. Defined as a state of conscious, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), mindfulness promotes emotional regulation, self-awareness, and compassion qualities increasingly recognized as essential for effective leadership and sustainable organizational cultures (Good et al., 2016; Reb et al., 2020). Over the past decade, mindfulness-based leadership training has gained momentum across both public and private sectors worldwide, demonstrating positive effects on job satisfaction, emotional well-being, and decision-making (Donald et al., 2020; Leroy et al., 2021). However, despite this global trend, empirical research in developing countries particularly in South Asian bureaucratic contexts remains limited. Studies focusing on mindfulness among public sector employees in Sri Lanka are notably scarce, even as these workers frequently experience bureaucratic rigidity, hierarchical constraints, and high emotional labour (Perera & Seneviratne, 2022). The absence of empirical insight into how mindfulness is understood, internalized, and practiced by Sri Lankan government employees represents a significant research gap.

This study addresses that gap by examining how public sector professionals including teachers, lecturers, principals, and heads of departments conceptualize and apply mindfulness in their professional lives. It further explores how mindful awareness influences leadership behaviour, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships within bureaucratic environments, while identifying contextual barriers to its sustained practice. Grounded in Mindful Leadership Theory (MLT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research situates mindfulness as both a personal discipline and an ethical relational practice, contributing to the broader understanding of leadership transformation in the Sri Lankan public sector.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship conceptualizes mindfulness as both a dispositional trait and a cultivated state that enhances emotional stability, cognitive clarity, and prosocial behaviour (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Dane, 2011). In organizational contexts, mindfulness has been shown to reduce burnout, strengthen interpersonal communication, and promote reflective decision-making (Good et al., 2016; Leroy et al., 2021). Recent studies further demonstrate that mindfulness contributes to psychological flexibility, ethical sensitivity, and resilience among professionals navigating high-stress work environments (Donald et al., 2020; Sutcliffe et al., 2022). Mindful Leadership

Theory (MLT) positions mindfulness as a leadership competency grounded in self-awareness, compassion, and non-reactivity (Reb et al., 2020). Mindful leaders create psychologically safe, empathetic, and inclusive organizational climates, thereby fostering trust and collaboration (Roche et al., 2020; Reb et al., 2020). Emerging literature from post-pandemic organizational research also highlights mindfulness as a critical buffer against emotional exhaustion and decision fatigue among leaders (Arendt et al., 2021). Similarly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs for motivation and well-being needs that mindfulness supports through enhanced self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and intrinsic alignment (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Li & Liu, 2023). Integrating MLT and SDT provides a dual perspective on how mindfulness nurtures both the intrapersonal and relational dimensions of leadership.

Within the Sri Lankan public sector, where bureaucratic constraints, emotional labour, and hierarchical pressures are common, mindfulness has the potential to enhance ethical decision-making, emotional

composure, and collegial harmony. However, empirical investigations remain limited. Recent local research has largely examined mindfulness as a tool for stress reduction among teachers and public servants rather than as a leadership competency (Perera & Seneviratne, 2022; Jayasinghe, 2023). Studies from broader South Asian contexts similarly note a lack of institutional support and cultural adaptation in mindfulness-based organizational practices (Khan et al., 2021; Ranasinghe & Rodrigo, 2022). This study therefore extends the existing literature by exploring how Sri Lankan public sector professionals including teachers, principals, lecturers, and administrators embody mindfulness in leadership, communication, and emotional regulation, and how systemic pressures influence their ability to sustain mindful awareness in bureaucratic environments.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how mindfulness is experienced, interpreted, and practiced among Sri Lankan government sector employees engaged in educational leadership. Phenomenology was selected as it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to mindfulness within the emotionally demanding and hierarchically structured public sector context. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants with relevant leadership and administrative responsibilities. The final sample consisted of 15 participants, including school principals, university lecturers, heads of departments, and assistant lecturers representing diverse government educational institutions. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes, carried out in both English and Tamil according to participant preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and right to withdraw at any stage. The interview guide included open-ended questions based on the theoretical integration of Mindful Leadership Theory (MLT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), exploring themes such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, compassion, intrinsic motivation, and stress management. Interviews were transcribed, and Tamil responses were translated and back-translated. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved repeated reading, open coding, theme development, and interpretive synthesis to identify patterns related to leadership mindfulness, emotional regulation, and institutional challenges.

Findings

Four major themes emerged from the thematic analysis: (1) Presence and Emotional Regulation in Work Roles; (2) Compassionate Leadership and Collegial Harmony; (3) Institutional Pressures and Mindfulness Fatigue; and (4) Growth of Mindful Awareness and Professional Integrity.

Presence and Emotional Regulation in Work Roles: Participants commonly described mindfulness as a practice of inner stillness that helped them manage workplace stress and remain composed under administrative demands. A school principal explained, *"Before starting my day, I take a few minutes to breathe quietly, it helps me respond wisely instead of reacting in anger."* Similarly, a university lecturer noted, *"Mindfulness keeps me centered when facing conflicting opinions or sudden deadlines."* These reflections demonstrate how mindfulness cultivates self-regulation, a core aspect of Mindful Leadership Theory (MLT). Participants reported that deliberate awareness of their emotions prevented impulsive decisions and improved clarity in leadership. As one head of department stated, *"When I notice frustration rising, I pause. That pause changes everything, and it allows space for better judgment."* The accounts underscore how mindful attention supports emotional equilibrium and rational decision-making within bureaucratic constraints.

Compassionate Leadership and Collegial Harmony: The second theme emphasized empathy, patient listening, and non-judgmental communication as essential dimensions of leadership mindfulness. Participants associated mindfulness with seeing others' perspectives and nurturing harmonious professional relationships. A lecturer reflected, *"Mindfulness has taught me to listen before judging, it builds trust among my colleagues."* Another participant added, *"Even when staff disagree, mindfulness reminds me to respond with kindness, not authority."* These experiences align closely with the relatedness component of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the human need for connectedness and mutual respect. Mindfulness thus emerged as a relational practice that softens hierarchical rigidity, fosters collegial cooperation, and enhances workplace empathy, qualities often under strain in public sector institutions.

Institutional Pressures and Mindfulness Fatigue: While participants valued mindfulness, they simultaneously described the systemic challenges that limited its sustained practice. Many identified bureaucratic procedures, excessive paperwork, and performance pressure as obstacles. One participant stated, *“Sometimes the system doesn’t allow space to breathe; mindfulness becomes a personal battle.”* Another shared, *“After long meetings and reports, I feel drained, and mindfulness feels distant though I know it helps.”* Several participants used the term “mindfulness fatigue” to describe the exhaustion from trying to maintain mindful awareness in an unsupportive institutional culture. This theme highlights the organizational gap between personal mindfulness and structural reform. As a senior lecturer told, *“The institution values efficiency, not reflection. That makes it hard to sustain mindfulness beyond my individual effort.”*

Growth of Mindful Awareness and Professional Integrity: Despite such

pressures, participants perceived mindfulness as a moral and professional compass that strengthened integrity, humility, and ethical leadership. A principal expressed, *“Mindfulness reminds me that leadership is about compassion, not control.”* Similarly, an assistant lecturer stated, *“It helps me act with honesty, even when no one is watching.”* These insights suggest that mindfulness extends beyond emotional regulation to encompass ethical awareness and authenticity, reflecting the moral dimension of Mindful Leadership Theory. Participants viewed mindfulness as a continuous journey toward self-improvement and purposeful service rather than a temporary coping mechanism.

Overall, the findings portray mindfulness as both a coping strategy and an ethical orientation that nurtures emotional resilience, collegial trust, and moral integrity in Sri Lanka’s public sector. While participants’ mindfulness practices were primarily self-initiated and individualized, their experiences revealed strong potential for institutional integration, if organizational cultures begin to value reflection and compassion alongside efficiency.

Conclusion and Implications

This study highlights mindfulness as a multidimensional practice integrating emotional regulation, compassion, and ethical awareness within Sri Lanka’s public sector workplaces. By fostering presence and empathy, mindfulness enhances leadership authenticity, emotional resilience, and collegial trust among educators and administrators. Yet, the findings also reveal that bureaucratic rigidity and lack of institutional recognition restrict its broader impact, reducing mindfulness to a personal coping strategy rather than a collective cultural shift. The integration of Mindful Leadership Theory (MLT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a nuanced understanding of how mindfulness mediates personal well-being and organizational ethics. However, the study's limited sample and context call for caution in generalization.

Future research should examine how structured mindfulness-based programs influence workplace culture, ethical decision-making, and leadership practices across different public institutions. Comparative and longitudinal studies could also explore how local spiritual and cultural traditions shape

the adaptation of mindfulness within Sri Lanka's governance system. Promoting institutional mindfulness through training and leadership development could thus serve not only individual well-being but also foster compassionate and ethical governance in the long term

Keywords

Mindfulness, Emotional Regulation, Public Sector, Leadership, Well-being

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MINDFULLNESS PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS TO IMPROVE FOCUS AND REDUCE STRESS: A STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RUHUNA

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Introduction

In recent years, mindfulness has gained growing attention in educational research as a promising approach to improving student well-being and academic performance. University students particularly in Sri Lanka experience increasing stress due to academic pressure, competitive environments, financial concerns, and digital distractions. These challenges often contribute to reduced concentration, emotional distress and diminished academic productivity. Mindfulness defined as paying deliberate, non-judgmental attention to the present moment offers a valuable method for enhancing focus, emotional regulation, and resilience. International research has demonstrated that mindfulness practices such as deep breathing, meditation and mindful awareness exercises can reduce anxiety and improve cognitive performance. However within the Sri Lankan university context the use of mindfulness remains limited and many students are unaware of its potential benefits or struggle to integrate it into their daily routines.

Research Problem

Despite global evidence supporting mindfulness little is known about its effectiveness, accessibility, and acceptance among Sri Lankan university students. This study therefore explores how mindfulness practices influence focus and stress reduction among first year undergraduate students at the University of Ruhuna.

Objectives

Specific Objective

To examine the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in enhancing students' focus and reducing stress levels.

Other objectives.

- To identify the most commonly used mindfulness techniques among students.
- To assess students' perceptions and attitudes toward mindfulness practices.

Literature Review

Mindfulness has become a key area of interest in psychology and education due to its positive impact on attention regulation and emotional well being. Kabat-Zinn's (1990) introduction of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) laid the foundation for mindfulness interventions designed to reduce stress through present-moment awareness. Subsequent studies have expanded this foundation: Baer (2003) highlighted mindfulness as an effective therapeutic tool, while Shapiro et al. (2008) emphasized its relevance in higher education settings. School and university-based studies show similar trends. Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, and Walach (2014) found that mindfulness programs improve concentration and decrease student anxiety. Tang et al. (2007) demonstrated that even short-term mindfulness training enhances attention and cognitive control. The Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) further supports these findings by suggesting that mindfulness enhances intrinsic motivation and autonomy.

Local studies in Sri Lanka (Amarasinghe, 2017; Jayasundara, 2019) also indicate positive student attitudes toward mindfulness, but they highlight gaps in implementation and awareness. Although international evidence strongly supports mindfulness research focusing on Sri Lankan university students is still limited. This study addresses this gap by examining both the effectiveness of mindfulness and students attitudes toward its use within a local academic environment.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design selected to provide both numerical evidence of effectiveness and rich qualitative insights into student experiences. A sample of 40 first-year students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna was selected through sample random sampling. This research Data Collection Methods is, Questionnaire, Focus group discussions, Interviews. I used Secondary sources it is, Books, journal articles, and previous studies supported the 3conceptual framework. This research Data was Analyzed used Quantitative data for analyzed using basic statistical techniques including descriptive statistics (mean, percentages) and comparisons of pre and post practice stress levels. And Qualitative date analyzed using thematic analysis identifying recurring themes such as emotional regulation, focus and perceived benefits. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary consent Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Findings

The study revealed that regular mindfulness practice had a significant positive impact on students focus, emotional well being, and ability to manage academic stress. After engaging in a simple daily mindfulness routine consisting of breathing exercises and short guided meditations students reported feeling calmer, more focused and better equipped to handle academic pressure.

Quantitative data indicated a noticeable reduction in stress levels along with improvements in attention span and task completion rates. Students who consistently practiced mindfulness were more engaged during lessons and displayed fewer signs of restlessness or distraction.

A notable qualitative finding was the development of greater emotional awareness. Many students reported that mindfulness helped them identify stress triggers early and respond in a calm and controlled manner rather than reacting impulsively. This increased emotional regulation also contributed to improved classroom behavior and stronger peer relationships.

Furthermore, mindfulness fostered a sense of balance enabling students to better manage both academic responsibilities and personal commitments. Enhanced empathy, patience and cooperation emerged as recurring themes in the qualitative responses.

Overall the findings suggest that mindfulness is a simple yet effective tool that promotes mental clarity, emotional stability and improved learning capacity. It not only enhances students focus and academic performance but also supports the development of lifelong coping skills that reduce anxiety and contribute to overall well being.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that mindfulness practices significantly enhance students attention, emotional regulation and ability to manage academic stress. Simple techniques such as deep breathing and short guided meditations proved effective and accessible for university students.

Academic Implications

The study contributes to the growing body of literature in educational psychology by providing local evidence of the effectiveness of mindfulness in a Sri Lankan context. It highlights the relevance of mindfulness as a tool for improving cognitive and emotional outcomes Practical Implications. Universities can integrate structured mindfulness programs into orientation sessions, student support services and classroom activities. Regular short mindfulness exercises could help students maintain emotional balance, improve learning capacity and develop lifelong coping skills.

Policy Implications

The findings support incorporating mindfulness into university well being policies, curriculum design and mental health frameworks. Policies promoting awareness, training and accessibility of mindfulness programs could significantly improve student wellness.

Limitations

- The sample size was relatively small (40 students).
- The study relied heavily on self-reported data, which may include bias.
- The short duration of the intervention limits long-term conclusions.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Conduct similar studies with larger and more diverse student samples.
- Examine long-term effects of mindfulness on academic performance.
- Compare different types of mindfulness interventions (e.g., yoga, body scans).
- Explore barriers to adopting mindfulness within university environments.

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GEN Z PERCEPTIONS OF AI-POWERED LEARNING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON WORKFORCE READINESS IN SRI LANKAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within higher education has begun to reshape how students learn, interact with course material, and prepare for future employment (Luckin et al., 2022). Tools such as automated feedback systems, adaptive learning platforms, and AI-supported tutoring have become increasingly common, particularly for Generation Z learners who are already familiar with digital environments (Teo, 2011). While these technologies offer clear advantages, the extent to which students feel comfortable using them and how this comfort translates into their readiness for an AI-driven workforce remains insufficiently understood. To ensure conceptual clarity, the present study defines "workforce readiness" as the degree to which learners possess the digital, cognitive, and socio-technical skills required to function effectively in technology-rich workplaces, including AI-related competencies (OECD, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020; Autor, 2015). The Sri Lankan Gen Z cohort is particularly important because the country is undergoing rapid digital transformation, with national initiatives such as Sri Lanka's Digital Economy Strategy emphasising AI integration and future skills (ICTA, 2023). However, little is known about how Sri Lankan Gen Z students perceive AI-enabled learning tools.

Existing scholarship largely examines individual factors such as perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989), the degree of trust placed in AI systems (Mayer, Shin, 2021), or concerns regarding how personal data are collected and used (West, 2019). However, limited research investigates the combined influence of these perceptions on AI-driven workforce readiness. Addressing this gap, the present study examines how perceived ease of use (PEOU), trust in AI (TR), and privacy and data concerns (PDC) collectively shape workforce readiness (WR) among Sri Lankan

Gen Z higher-education students.

Literature Review

Studies on educational technology consistently emphasise that students' perceptions play a decisive role in the adoption of new digital tools (Teo, 2011). The Technology Acceptance Model positions perceived ease of use as a key determinant of user engagement, with research showing that learners are more likely to embrace AI-based systems when interactions are simple and intuitive (Davis, 1989). Trust in AI has also emerged as an important factor, shaped by perceptions of accuracy, fairness and the transparency of algorithmic processes; when these qualities are evident, students demonstrate a greater willingness to rely on AI-generated feedback (Mayer, Shin, 2021). Alongside this, scholars have highlighted concerns around data privacy and surveillance, particularly in learning environments that depend on extensive data collection and behavioural monitoring (West, 2019; Büchi, Festic & Latzer, 2019).

However, most studies examine these constructs independently, resulting in a theoretical gap regarding their combined impact on broader student outcomes such as workforce readiness. Workforce readiness research suggests that digital adaptability, AI literacy, and comfort with automated systems are increasingly essential employability assets (OECD, 2019; WEF, 2020; van Laar et al., 2017). Despite this, the integration of AI-specific readiness into higher-education research remains under-explored. The present study contributes to this gap by merging AI trust, technology acceptance, and digital-skills literature within a Sri Lankan context.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, a commonly used approach for examining behavioural perceptions within educational settings (Creswell, 2014). A structured questionnaire was developed using established measurement scales for perceived ease of use (PEOU), trust in AI (TR), privacy and data concerns (PDC), and workforce readiness (WR), consistent with prior technology-acceptance and AI-perception research (Davis, 1989; Mayer, West, 2019). Each construct comprised five items measured on a Likert scale. The survey was administered online to 128 Generation Z students representing multiple academic programmes, selected through convenience sampling, which is appropriate for exploratory technology-related studies (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Ethical procedures included informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and secure data handling in accordance with standard research ethics guidelines (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After data collection, the dataset was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression. All constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.820 and 0.870, exceeding the recommended threshold (Hair et al., 2019).

Research Findings

The analysis showed that students generally held positive views toward AI-enabled learning. Respondents indicated that the AI systems they used were easy to navigate, and many felt confident applying such tools in professional settings. Trust in AI was moderate, suggesting that while students found the systems reasonably reliable, they still exercised some caution, particularly when the decision-making processes were not entirely transparent. Privacy and data concerns were present, but not strong enough to discourage students from using AI tools, as many appeared to prioritise the perceived benefits of these technologies.Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between perceived ease of use and workforce readinesss (0.66), with trust also showing a meaningful association (0.54). Privacy and data concerns displayed a weaker link with readiness (0.33). Regression analysis further demonstrated that perceived ease of use and trust in AI were significant predictors of workforce readiness, whereas privacy concerns contributed only minimally.

A multiple regression was conducted to examine the predictive effects of PEOU, TR and PDC on WR. Approximately 49.4% of the variance in workforce readiness (R^2 = 0.494) is explained by three predictors, indicating a moderately strong level of predictive power.

These findings align with TAM research, reinforcing the influence of usability perceptions on technology-related behavioural outcomes. They also support emerging evidence that trust is central to AI-related engagement (Shin, 2021), whereas privacy concerns though relevant may be secondary for Gen Z learners who prioritise functional and performance benefits (Büchi et al., 2019).

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study indicate that perceived ease of use and trust in AI systems play a central role in shaping how prepared students feel for future employment in technology-rich environments. This pattern aligns with broader evidence suggesting that user-friendly systems and transparent algorithmic processes enhance confidence and encourage sustained engagement (Davis, 1989; Shin, 2021). Although concerns about privacy and data use remain relevant in digital learning contexts, they did not meaningfully influence students' readiness in this study, reflecting observations that many learners prioritise the functional benefits of AI over potential data risks (West, 2019). These results suggest that higher-education institutions should focus on designing intuitive AI tools and cultivating trust through clearer explanations of how automated decisions are generated. Strengthening communication around data-handling practices may also ease residual concerns. Furthermore, incorporating AI literacy into curricula through hands-on training and exposure to workplace-relevant applications can help students transition more effectively into AI-driven professional settings (OECD, 2019). This study's key contribution lies in demonstrating how multiple AI-related perceptions jointly influence AI-driven workforce readiness within the Sri Lankan higher-education sector, an area with limited prior research. Although privacy concerns remain, they have minimal impact on readiness. Accordingly, higher-education institutions should focus on strengthening students' AI capabilities by integrating AI literacy and practical skills into curricula (van Laar et al., 2017), improving algorithmic transparency to enhance trust (Shin, 2021), establishing clear guidelines for ethical AI use and data protection (OECD, 2021), and providing targeted support for AI-enabled learning tools to reduce usability barriers. Together, these measures can help better prepare graduates for an AI-intensive labour market.

Keywords

Workforce Readiness, Perceived Ease of Use, Trust in AI, privacy and data concerns, Gen Z

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THE IMPACT OF AI APPLICATIONS ON THE DECLINE OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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Introduction

Within management education, critical thinking is considered essential for cultivating analytical, reflective, and evidence based decision making skills among future business leaders (Bezanilla et al., 2012; Poblete et al., 2023). It enables students to interpret data, evaluate alternatives, and formulate strategies in complex and uncertain environments (Turan et al., 2019). However, Hou et al. (2025) and Kumar and James (2023) elaborate that management students' overreliance on technology has been shown to diminish critical thinking abilities by promoting cognitive shortcuts rather than deep analytical engagement. This decline poses risks to graduates' academic and professional development, employability, and overall organizational competitiveness.

This specific research study is going to find about how the use of artificial intelligence (AI), tools and applications have reduced management students' critical thinking abilities when used within academic work. (AI) was first conceptualized in the 1950s, has become highly advanced and integrated into education by 2023–2024 through tools like ChatGPT, QuillBot, and Grammarly. These generative applications enable tasks such as text creation, assignments, and presentations, making academic work quicker and easier.

Research questions

1) What is the current impact and potential of AI applications towards the management students?

2) What is the extent to which the management students are depending on AI applications for critical thinking?

3) What other alternatives academic practices can be used to increase critical thinking abilities for management students, to minimize the use of AI applications used for critical thinking.

Research Aim and Objectives

Aim: To make the management students understand the repercussions of over reliance on AI software within academic work and how that affects the future business world.

Objective 1: To explore the current impact and the potential of AI applications towards the management students.

Objective 2: To investigate to what extent the management students are depending on AI applications for critical thinking

Objective 3: To suggest alternative academic practices to increase critical thinking abilities for management students, to minimize the use of AI applications used for critical thinking

Literature Review

Over the past four decades, particularly in Western contexts, research has shown an increasing need for critical thinking skills to meet the challenges of technology and globalization (Jaffar, 2025). This concern arises as fewer students demonstrate the ability to think critically in academic and professional settings. Within management education, critical thinking is essential for cultivating analytical, reflective, and evidence based decision-making skills among future business leaders (Bezanilla et al., 2019; Poblete, 2021). It enables students to interpret data, evaluate alternatives, and develop strategies in complex and uncertain environments (Paul and Elder, 2014).

One contributing factor that limits the development of critical thinking is rote memorization. Klemm (2025), Rosario (2025), and Thankachan (2024) emphasize that memorizing without understanding suppresses creativity and problem-solving. Similarly, Housni et al. (2023) found that 65% of students identified rote learning as a barrier to developing critical thinking, while Palavan (2020) demonstrated that such methods hinder preservice teachers' analytical abilities too. These findings suggest that when learning focuses primarily on repetition and recall, students fail to engage in reasoning and reflection skills necessary for higher order thinking and decision-making.

Another factor influencing critical thinking is frequent reliance on artificial intelligence (AI). Hou et al. (2024) found that 72% of students heavily dependent on AI exhibited reduced analytical skills, while Gerlich (2025) reported that over 70% reliance correlated with a 30% decline in critical thinking performance due to cognitive offloading. Similarly, Zahrani (2024) observed a 25% reduction in reasoning ability among AI dependent learners, and Chen and Lin (2024) confirmed negative correlations between high AI usage and critical thinking. This suggests that excessive dependence on AI tools encourages students to accept automated outputs without questioning or analyzing them, which weakens their independent reasoning abilities.

A further determinant is overconfidence, which often leads students to neglect self-evaluation and feedback. Moore and Healy (2008), Semerci et al. (2024), Erat et al. (2020), and Chan and Molteni (2015) found that overconfident learners tend to overestimate their competencies, ignore constructive criticism, and resist alternative viewpoints. Such attitudes hinder intellectual humility and reflective judgment both vital components of critical thinking.

Overall, the literature indicates that rote memorization, overreliance on AI, and overconfidence each impede the development of critical thinking by discouraging deep engagement, reflection, and self-assessment.

Methodology

This study was done using a positivist, quantitative approach using a deductive method guided by the research onion model (Saunders et al., 2019), it enables objective and measurable analysiis of relationships among variables. The popullation comprised 137 Higher National Diploma (HND) students in business management at a reputed campus in Colombo. Using Morgan's table, the required sample size was 103, and 98 valid responses were collected, meeting the advised threshold of above 95 (Bukhari, 2021). A simple random sampling methed was employed to ensure unbiased representation of the study population. This approach was appropriate since it minimizes selection bias and enhances the representativeness of the sample, allowing each participant an equal chance of being selected (Makwana et al., 2023). Moreover, it improves the generalizability of the findings to the broader population, which aligns with the study's quantitative and positivist design (Saunders et al., 2019).

Data was collected through an online survey consisting of Likert scale questions. The instrument included five items on critical thinking skills, AI usage in academic work, and rote memorization, alongside four items on negligence due to overconfidence, and two demographic questions (gender and age). The study followed a cross-sectional time horizon, as it was conducted within a short period. Data was analyzed using SPSS with reliability tests, descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mean comparisons.

Research Findings

Reliability Analysis

- The instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.735, indicating high internal consistency. Values above 0.7 is the benchmark and are generally considered reliable.

Comparison of Mean values of Age and Gender

1. Students aged 16–20 show higher critical thinking and overconfidence, 20–25 rely more on AI and memorization, while 25+ apply practical experience, using less AI.
2. Males scored higher than females in AI use, rote memorization, overconfidence, and critical thinking likely due to work pressures, quick strategies, leadership roles, and greater risk-taking tendencies.

Correlation Analysis

1. The findings show a strong positive correlation ($r = .630$, $p < .001$) between management students' use of AI tools in academic work and their critical thinking skills, indicating a statistically significant and reliable relationship (Saunders et al., 2019).
2. The results reveal a weak positive correlation ($r = .354$, $p < .001$) between rote memorization and critical thinking among management students, indicating a statistically significant and reliable relationship (Jayalath, 2024).
3. The findings indicate a weak positive correlation ($r = .440$, $p < .001$) between overconfidence and critical thinking skills in management students, showing the relationship is statistically significant and reliable (Saunders et al., 2019.

Regression Analysis

1. Regression results show AI use explains 39% of variance in critical thinking (Adj. $R^2 = .390$), with significance ($p < .001$). Coefficient (.503) suggests increased AI use reduces critical thinking, supported by low Std. Error and sig. value < .001.
2. Regression shows rote memorization explains only 11.6% of variance in critical thinking (Adj. $R^2 = .116$), though significant ($p < .001$). Coefficient (.314) indicates increased rote memorization slightly reduces critical thinking, supported by low Std. Error and sig. < .001.

3. Regression shows overconfidence explains 18.5% of variance in critical thinking (Adj. R^2 = .185), with significance ($p < .001$). Coefficient (.454) suggests higher overconfidence reduces critical thinking, supported by low Std. Error and sig. < .001 (Jayalath, 2024).

Conclusion and Implications

AI use (Adj. R^2 = .390) showed a stronger impact on students' critical thinking compared to rote memorization (.116) and overconfidence (.185), indicating it is the most influential factor among the three. However, the relatively low R^2 value suggests that other factors beyond the study's independent variables also exists that decreases critical thinking.

A larger sample size could have provided more data and possibly increased the explanatory power of AI use and demonstrated that it passes 51% in linear regression analysis.

These findings highlight the growing importance of developing critical thinking skills to navigate technological and global challenges (Moore, 2011).

Keywords

Critical thinking, artificial intelligence academic performance, rote memorization, overconfidence, higher education.

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IMPACT OF AI POWERED ANALYTICS PROGRAM ON EMPLOYEE WELLBEING: A CASE STUDY ON DIALOG AXIATA PLC WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COLOMBO DISTRICT

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Introduction

The contemporary workplace is increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI), marking a transformative shift towards data – driven organisational management. While AI powered analytics promise enhanced operational efficiency and insights into employee behaviour, their direct impact on employee wellbeing remains underexplored, especially within specific organisational contexts (Soulami et al., 2024). This study addresses this gap by examining the effects of an AI – powered analytics program at Dialog Axiata PLC, a leading Sri Lankan telecommunications firm.

The research problem is underscored by preliminary internal data indicate high levels of employee stress, work – life imbalance, and dissatisfaction with schedule flexibility despite advanced AI tools, highlighting an inconsistent relationship between technological advancement and wellbeing (Zhou et al., 2024).

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of AI – powered analytics program on employee wellbeing at Dialog Axiata PLC in Colombo District.

2. To evaluate the role of data quality and governance in the effectiveness of AI – powered analytics programs at Dialog Axiata PLC in Colombo District.

3.To assess employee acceptance and adoption levels of AI – powered analytics and their impact on employee wellbeing.

4. To analyse the influence of technological infrastructure on the successful implementation of AI – powered analytics program.

5.To examine organisational readiness in supporting AI – powered analytics and effect on employee wellbeing.

6. To explore the combined impact of data quality, employee acceptance, technological

infrastructure, and organisational readiness on employee wellbeing, including mental health, job satisfaction, and work – life balance.

Literature Review

The integration of AI – powered analytics in Human Resources is increasingly recognised for the potential to enhance employee wellbeing, encompassing mental, physical, and emotional health. Arevin et al. (2024) empirically demonstrated that AI platforms improve employee mood and engagement through real time monitoring and personalised stress interventions, leading to reduced turnover. Success factors critical to these programs include robust data quality and governance, a strong technological infrastructure, and high levels of employee acceptance driven by perceived usefulness and ease of use (Janssen et al., 2020; Uren and Edwards, 2023). Organisational readiness is fundamentally anchored in leadership commitment and a supportive culture (Hradecky et al., 2022).

The proposed benefits are significant, as AI analytics can proactively identify risks of stress and burnout, enabling timely, personalised interventions that may improve job satisfaction and reduce absenteeism. However, clear research gaps remain, including employee concerns over data privacy, stress from perceived surveillance, and ethical challenges surrounding algorithmic management (Bankins and Formosa, 2023; Hassan, 2024). The literature cautions that without careful management, these factors could undermine wellbeing. Consequently, validating these complex dynamics within specific organisational contexts is crucial, which this study seeks to address.

Methodology

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy and deductive approach to empirically test hypothesised relationships between AI powered analytics and employee wellbeing (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A quantitative, cross sectional design used a structured questionnaire for data collection (Saunders et al., 2019). The population comprised employees of Dialog Axiata PLC, with 120 participants initially selected through simple random sampling. However, a total of 100 valid responses were obtained and analysed. The survey instrument, designed based on a comprehensive conceptual framework, measured key independent variables such as data quality, employee acceptance, technological infrastructure, and organisational readiness against employee wellbeing (Hradecky et al., 2022). Pilot testing was conducted to refine the instrument, followed by evaluations of reliability and validity. The results demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.8, and satisfactory sampling adequacy, indicated by a KMO value above 0.7. Ethical approval and organisational consent to conduct the study was granted by Dialog Axiata and relevant boards. Participants provided informed consent, and data confidentiality was maintained through anonymisation and secure storage. Data were analysed using SPSS to identify significant correlations and regression relationships, ensuring robustness and generalisability of the findings.

Research Findings

The analysis of data from 100 valid responses from Dialog Axiata PLC yielded significant insights into the relationship between AI – powered analytics and employee wellbeing.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics showed that employees rated Data Quality and Governance highest (mean = 3.20), followed by Organisational Readiness (3.15) and Technological Infrastructure (3.13). Employee Acceptance and Adoption scored 3.10, while Employee Wellbeing was slightly lower at 3.07. Standard deviations indicated moderate variability, with Employee Acceptance showing the highest variation. Skewness values were close to zero, suggesting near normal distributions.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis revealed very strong positive correlations between all independent variables and employee wellbeing. The AI powered analytics program had the highest correlation (r=0.926), followed by employee acceptance (r=0.895) and organisational readiness (r=0.894). Data quality and governance (r=0.853) and technological infrastructure (r=0.871) also showed significant positive relationships.

Regression Analysis

Regression results confirmed all independent variables significantly predict employee wellbeing ($p < 0.001$). The AI program was the strongest predictor, explaining 85.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.858$). The equation $Y = 0.389 + 0.857 X$ indicates a 0.857 unit increase in wellbeing per one unit improvement in the AI program. Organisational readiness, employee acceptance, technological infrastructure, and data governance explained between 72.7% and 80.0% of variance.

In summary, the findings provide conclusive empirical evidence that the implementation of AI – powered analytics at Dialog Axiata has a profoundly positive and statistically significant impact on employee wellbeing. This success relies heavily on strengths in organisational readiness, employee acceptance, robust technological infrastructure, and highquality data governance.

Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that the AI – powered analytics program at Dialog Axiata PLC has a strong positive impact on employee wellbeing. The success relies on organisational enablers such as high quality data governance, employee acceptance, and technological infrastructure (Janssen et al., 2020). These factors explain a significant portion of employee wellbeing variance. Theoretically, this study extends the TOE and TAM frameworks by highlighting the critical role of human and organisational factors (Soulami et al., 2024). Practically, it offers a roadmap emphasising transparent communication, ethical data governance, and a supportive culture to address privacy and job security concerns (Hassan, 2024).

Ultimately, a human – centric strategy is essential to harness AI's potential for creating more supportive, productive workplaces. This research also carries important policy implications for Sri Lanka's labour and ICT sectors, highlighting the need for regulations that ensure ethical AI deployment, protect data privacy, and support workforce reskilling. Such measures will help ensure that the benefits of AI are distributed equitably while mitigating associated risks.

Keywords

Keywords: AI – powered analytics, employee wellbeing, data quality and governance, employee acceptance and adoption, organisational readiness, Dialog Axiata PLC.

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DETERMINANTS OF AI ADOPTION IN HRM PRACTICES: CASE STUDY ON ABC APPAREL PVT LTD

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Human Resource Management (HRM) have become the new reality of business operations by providing businesses with intelligence-driven platforms to conduct recruitment processes, performance, learning, and workforce planning processes. In advanced economies, solutions applied using AI, including predictive analytics, resume-screening algorithms, and virtual assistants, have become prevalent, also boosting efficiency and allowing the strategic use of other HR functions (Tusquellas et al., 2024; Koman et al., 2024). The trend in developing economies, however, has been very different, with developing economies in many cases only using it to accomplish administrative tasks like attendance or payroll monitoring. This mismatch makes it clear that the adoption rates of AI in the resource-limited, labour-intensive apparel industry in Sri Lanka should be studied. This study aims to investigate the determinants of technological, organisational, and managerial elements and their influence on AI adoption across the HRM functions with the h[RJ1] elp of the TOE model and the UTAUT model to come up with insights that can both transform the organization of ABC Apparel and widen the policy and management approach of the Sri Lankan apparel industry.

[RJ1] The research aim is stated, but it could be simplified and made more concise.

Literature Review

The Technology- Organization-Environment (TOE) framework establishes technology infrastructural, organizational preparedness, and environmental pressures as the key motivating factors of successive adoption (Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990). Complementarily, UTAUT has also focused on the individual-level acceptance factors such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions--which are important in the managerial [RJ1] buy-in, especially (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Multi-level adoption dynamics are usually eluded in single-framework applications, and mirror their synthesis (Zhang et al., 2024).

The world experience of the empirical sphere proves the significant benefits of AI: U.S. companies note that with the help of AI screening algorithms, the time of recruitment was reduced by 30-50 percent (Dattner et al., 2019), and European researchers note that predictive workforce analytics positively affect retention rates (Koman et al., 2024). But, South Asian situations are the opposite. Indian IT companies are moving in the direction of AI hiring despite their problems with algorithmic bias (Ghosh et al., 2016), but Sri Lankan apparel companies keep in place their IT systems, risk-averse organizational cultures, and top-down decision-making (Gunawardane et al., 2022; De Silva and Weerasinghe, 2021).

Methodology

The research was based on the positivist philosophy, deductive research, and explanatory character (Saunders et al., 2019). The population size of the quantitative case study was that of 318 HR practitioners and managers in ABC Apparel, and based on the Morgan table, stratified random sampling yielded 175 respondents (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). The data were collected through a survey questionnaire of a 5-point Likert scale, constructs were operationalized, and the data were analysed using SPSS v26.

Research Findings

The respondent demographics were in balance (51.4% female, 48.6% male), largely mid-career (40.6% aged 35 - 44 years, 72.6% (Bachelor/Master), and with a high education level (84% moderate-high familiarity). Descriptive statistics showed a high level of agreement between constructs: AI adoption ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.68$), technological factors ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.72$), organizational factors ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.75$), and managerial factors ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.70$). Pearson correlation established that there are significant positive relationships (technological $r = 0.852$, organizational $r = 0.728$, managerial $r = 0.722$; all $p<0.005$). All hypotheses were supported ($b = .391$, $p<.005$, H1 supported, $b=.530$, $p<.005$, H2 supported, $b = .522$, $p<.005$, H3 supported): technological factors, organizational factors, managerial factors. The model accounted for 73.7 percent of the variations in AI adoption.

Conclusion and Implications

The adoption of AI in the HRM practices of the ABC Apparel can be predicted by technological readiness, organizational support, and managerial competence as empirically valid change integration predictors within the context of the apparel industry in Sri Lanka via TOE-UTAUT (Nguyen et al., 2022). Implications imply practical governance policies on IT infrastructure modernization, leadership upskilling programs, and AI governance policies to make available strategic uses of artificial intelligence in predictive talent acquisition and workforce analytics. In theory, results can be extrapolated to the emerging economies, which are labour-intensive.[RJ1]Relevant frameworks (TOE and UTAUT) are appropriately used. However, the discussion is slightly lengthy for an extended abstract and could be more focused on key determinants only.

Keywords

Keywords: AI-Adoption, HRM Practices, TOE-UTAT Framework, Digital Transformation

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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS AND DIGITAL LITERACY AMONG MANAGEMENT LEARNERS

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Introduction

Digital transformation has reshaped higher education by creating learning environments that rely heavily on digital platforms, online assessments and virtual collaboration tools, making digital competence a vital requirement for academic engagement. Digital literacy is defined as the ability to locate, evaluate, interpret and communicate information using digital technologies (Frydenberg and Lorenz, 2020), while cybersecurity awareness refers to the knowledge, behaviours and skills required to recognise online threats and adopt safe digital practices that protect personal and institutional data (Shillair et al., 2022). Despite these competencies being essential for management learners, research highlights that non-technical students often lack structured cybersecurity training, resulting in higher vulnerability to cyber risks and reduced confidence when navigating digital environments (Elrayah, 2023). In Sri Lanka, the rapid expansion of digitally mediated learning has intensified the importance of strengthening student digital competence; however, limited empirical research examines how cybersecurity awareness influences digital literacy within management education.

To address this gap, the study is guided by the following research questions: and Accordingly, the study aims to achieve three research objectives: to assess cybersecurity awareness among management learners, to evaluate their digital literacy levels and to analyse the extent to which cybersecurity awareness influences digital literacy in the context of Sri Lankan higher education.

Research Questions

i)What are the current levels of cybersecurity awareness among management learners?

ii)What are the current levels of digital literacy among management learners?

iii)Does cybersecurity awareness significantly influence digital literacy?

Objectives

i)To measure the current level of cybersecurity awareness among management learners.

ii) To evaluate the digital literacy levels of management learners.

iii)To analyse the relationship between cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy and determine its significance.

Literature Review

Digital literacy has evolved considerably over the past decade. Contemporary frameworks such as DigComp 2.2 and Jisc's Digital Capabilities Model conceptualise digital competence as a multidimensional construct involving information processing, online communication, content creation, safety, and ethical participation (Jisc, 2022; Vuorikari et al., 2022). These models emphasise that safety and security particularly data protection, privacy, and responsible behaviour are integral to digital literacy rather than optional add-ons.

Cybersecurity awareness research highlights the importance of threat recognition, password management, safe browsing, and privacy protection. Shillair et al. (2022) found that cybersecurity training improves user behaviour significantly when learners are exposed to real-world scenarios such as phishing simulations. Elrayah (2023) emphasised the role of digital literacy in reducing users' vulnerability to cyber threats by strengthening their ability to evaluate information and make ethical choices. Furthermore, Ismaeel et al. (2025) demonstrated that individuals with higher digital literacy are less likely to fall victim to cybercrime.

However, empirical studies explicitly examining the link between cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy remain limited, particularly in non-technical academic disciplines. Management learners represent an underserved population in cybersecurity research despite their extensive use of digital tools. This study aims to address this gap by examining how cybersecurity awareness influences digital literacy within a Sri Lankan educational context.

Methodology

A positivist quantitative research design was used to test the hypothesised relationship between cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy. A structured questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale (1=

Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was administered to 58 management learners enrolled in Diploma, HND, Degree, and Master's programmes across Sri Lanka. The instrument consisted of seven items measuring cybersecurity awareness and four items assessing digital literacy, adapted from validated international studies.

Data were analysed using SPSS. Reliability testing established internal consistency for both constructs: cybersecurity awareness ($\alpha = 0.77$) demonstrated acceptable reliability, while digital literacy ($\alpha = 0.86$) indicated strong reliability. This confirmed that the items were suitable for composite score generation. Descriptive statistics were used to assess average levels of awareness and literacy, and Pearson correlation analysis tested the strength and significance of the relationship between the two variables.

Research Findings

The descriptive analysis revealed that management learners demonstrate moderate to high cybersecurity awareness ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.70$) and digital literacy ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.83$). Respondents reported strong protective behaviours such as maintaining strong passwords ($M = 4.02$) and avoiding sharing personal information online ($M = 3.98$). These findings suggest that students possess personal responsibility in online spaces. However, the lowest mean score was recorded for the item relating to formal cybersecurity education within management programmes ($M = 2.25$). This highlights a systemic gap: while students attempt to protect themselves, institutional support and curriculum design do not sufficiently address cybersecurity.

The Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a strong positive relationship between cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$). This result is statistically significant and indicates that learners with higher cybersecurity awareness are more capable of evaluating information, identifying online risks, and engaging safely and confidently in digital environments. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 \approx 0.53$) shows that 53% of the variance in digital literacy can be explained by cybersecurity awareness levels. This is a substantial influence, reinforcing that cybersecurity awareness is not merely complementary to digital literacy it is foundational to it.

Conclusion and Implications

The study concludes that cybersecurity awareness strongly predicts digital literacy among management learners. While students exhibit positive cybersecurity behaviours at the personal level, the lack of formal

cybersecurity education within management curricula is a concern. Integrating cybersecurity competencies such as phishing awareness, password hygiene, data protection, and ethical online behaviour into digital literacy frameworks can enhance learners' confidence, safety, and academic performance. Institutions should embed cybersecurity modules within management programmes, incorporate real-world simulations, and establish stronger institutional support for cyber-safe practices.

Strengthening cybersecurity awareness enhances not only students' academic readiness but also their professional preparedness in increasingly digitised workplaces. In the long term, building a cyber-aware learner community contributes to safer digital ecosystems within higher education and beyond.

Keywords

Cybersecurity Awareness; Digital Literacy; Management Education; Digital Competence; Higher Education

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ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ON SUCCESSFUL SUPPLY CHAIN INTEGRATION: A STUDY IN SELECTED APPAREL MANUFACTURERS OF SRI LANKA

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Introduction

Supply Chain Management (SCM) involves coordinating and optimizing all activities required to produce and deliver a product or service from sourcing raw materials to final delivery. It focuses on improving efficiency, reducing costs, and enhancing customer satisfaction through effective planning, production, and logistics (Christopher,2016). A key element of SCM is supply chain integration (SCI), which aligns and connects suppliers, manufacturers, and distributors to ensure smooth information and material flows. Effective supply chain integration transforms SCM into a unified, strategic system that strengthens competitiveness and responsiveness.

This study examines the critical role of internal communication in enhancing supply chain integration (SCI) within Sri Lanka's apparel industry. The apparel sector, driven by fast-changing fashion trends and short product lifecycles, requires efficient supply chain management (SCM) to minimize lead times, reduce excess inventory, and ensure timely delivery (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020; Statista, 2021). Sri Lanka's garment industry, a major contributor to national exports, faces challenges such as rising production costs, fluctuating raw material prices, and strong competition from low-cost producers like China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and India (Abeynanda, 2017; Hamja et al., 2019). These pressures highlight the need for cost efficiency and improved SCM to sustain global competitiveness (Kelegama, 2009; Arai, 2016). Effective internal communication is a key enabler of SCI, facilitating coordination, information sharing, and collaboration across functions and with supply chain partners (Zhu, 2016; Khan & Yu, 2019). Inadequate communication can lead to operational disruptions, shipment delays, and reduced export performance (Renuka & Herath, 2014). This study aims to identify elements influencing internal communication, assess their impact on supply chain integration, and develop strategies to strengthen communication for enhanced efficiency and competitiveness, ultimately improving Sri Lanka's apparel export performance and cost-effectiveness.

Literature Review

Internal communication plays a vital role in organizational performance and supply chain integration (SCI). It involves the exchange of information between executives and employees to build trust, engagement, and operational efficiency (Ashby et al., 2016; Chandra & Kuma, 2017). Effective communication ensures that employees are informed, motivated, and aligned with organizational goals, while poor communication leads to project failures, demotivation, and loss of business opportunities (Economist, 2021; Jacobs et al., 2016). Internal communication fosters collaboration, creativity, and responsiveness to change, contributing to organizational success (Pakurár et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019).

Supply chain integration, which coordinates activities among suppliers, manufacturers, and customers, enhances competitiveness by improving quality, reducing costs, and increasing customer satisfaction (Arend & Wisner, 2004; Gligor & Holcomb, 2016). It involves functional, internal, and external collaboration supported by information sharing and coordinated logistics (Flynn et al., 2016; Gunasekaran & Ngai, 2016). Communication technologies and information quality are critical for achieving integration and responsiveness (Zhong et al., 2016; Elgazzar & Elzarka, 2017). Furthermore, mutual agreement and relational trust between partners strengthen cooperation and performance in supply chain networks (Singh & Trivedi, 2016; Winter & Knemeyer, 2016). Overall, efficient internal communication serves as the foundation for effective SCI, enhancing organizational agility and competitiveness.

In conclusion, the above studies highlight that effective supply chain integration (SCI) is vital for improving organizational performance and competitiveness. Supported by strong internal communication, SCI enhances collaboration, trust, and information flow across the supply chain, leading to greater efficiency, responsiveness, and customer satisfaction. Overall, integration and communication together strengthen agility and long-term success in dynamic business environments

Methodology

This study adopted a positivist philosophy and a deductive research approach, enabling the development and testing of hypotheses using quantitative data. A survey strategy was employed to collect large-scale, measurable data suitable for statistical analysis. The research followed a cross-sectional time horizon, focusing on a specific period rather than long-term observation. The target population comprised 1,384 employees of ABC Holdings in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka, with 159 employees using a selection criterion focused on employees directly involved in supply chain-related functions such as procurement, logistics, and operations. Participants were required to possess relevant knowledge or experience in supply chain activities and hold positions contributing to coordination or decision-making within these processes. Using the Qualtrics (2021) sample size calculator, 101 respondents were determined sufficient for a 90% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A probability-based stratified sampling technique ensured representation across employee categories. Primary data were collected through an online survey distributed via email, with responses automatically stored in a database. Data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, reliability testing, correlation, and regression analyses to test the study's hypotheses and examine variable relationships.

Research Findings

A total of 159 questionnaires were distributed to employees of ABC Holdings in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka, with 122 responses received. After removing 13 invalid responses, 109 valid questionnaires were analysed, exceeding the required sample size of 100. The demographic analysis revealed that 58% of respondents were female and 42% male. The majority (51%) were aged 31–50 years, followed by 37% aged 18–30 years, and 12% aged above 50. In terms of education, 53% had completed secondary school, while 47% held college-level qualifications. Regarding tenure, 44% had worked between 1–5 years, 40% for over 5 years, and 16% for less than

a year. The reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha confirmed that all variables supply topology, communication technology, information quality, mutual agreement, and supply chain integration had values above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency and data reliability.

Descriptive statistics revealed that most responses were within the neutral range (mean ≈ 3.00) on the Likert scale, suggesting balanced perceptions regarding all variables. Skewness and kurtosis values fell within acceptable limits (+1 to -1 and +3 to -3, respectively), confirming normal data distribution.

Correlation analysis indicated a positive and significant relationship between all independent variables and the dependent variable (supply chain integration). The regression analysis further revealed that 99% ($R^2 = 0.99$) of the variance in supply chain integration was explained by the independent variables. The ANOVA results ($F > 0.05$, Sig < 0.000) confirmed that the overall model was statistically significant.

Among the predictors, mutual agreement ($\beta = 0.664$) had the strongest impact on supply chain integration, followed by supply topology ($\beta = 0.657$), information quality ($\beta = 0.584$), and communication technology ($\beta = 0.563$). These findings indicates that effective communication mechanisms, trust-based relationships, and information quality significantly enhance supply chain integration and operational efficiency within Sri Lanka's apparel industry.

Conclusion and Implications

The study confirmed that effective internal communication significantly enhances Supply Chain Integration (SCI) in Sri Lanka's garment industry. Survey analysis depicts strong positive correlations between SCI and four key factors: supply topology (73.3%; influence 65.7%), communication technology (95.8%; influence 56.3%), information quality (98%; influence 58.4%), and mutual agreement (87.7%; influence 66.4%). These findings align with the literature emphasizing the role of information sharing, technology, and collaboration in improving operational efficiency. Despite being limited to the apparel sector and internal communication scope, the study provides practical insights for enhancing SCI. Recommendations include,

- Adopting responsive supply chain architectures,
- Strengthening technological integration,
- Improving information accuracy and timeliness,
- Emphasizing data-driven collaboration, demand forecasting and inventory optimization.

Overall, the study suggests that effective internal communication is crucial for successful supply chain integration, as it directly enhances coordination, information flow, and collaborative decision-making, thereby strengthening operational efficiency and competitiveness in the garment industry.

Keywords

Supply Chain Integration (SCI), Internal Communication, Information Quality, Communication Technology, Supply Topology.

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON TEACHER ENGAGEMENT WITHIN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS UNDER THE DIOCESE OF COLOMBO

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Introduction

International schools within the Diocese of Colombo operate in a complex, multicultural environment where effective leadership is critical for organisational success. Based on a report from the General Manager's office (Dias, 2023), international schools under the Colombo Diocese are facing a problem of low employee engagement, which is critical for organizational success and teaching quality.While existing research establishes that transformational leadership significantly affects employee engagement (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Budur, 2020), its direct impact within this specific educational context has been overlooked (Khan et al., 2023). This study aims to address this gap by investigating how transformational leadership influences employee engagement in these schools.The research is guided by three objectives: to identify leadership styles that hinder engagement, to examine how leaders can improve their abilities through self-reflection.

Literature Review

Leadership style is a critical determinant of teacher engagement, which directly influences student performance and overall school success. Extensive research demonstrates that transformational leadership-characterised by inspiring a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration-proves highly effective in fostering teacher engagement, particularly in multicultural educational environments (Bass, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Research confirms that the positive effect of transformational leadership in international schools is mediated by factors such as psychological empowerment and cultural adaptability (Wang et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Transformational leaders who demonstrate cultural intelligence and foster inclusive environments effectively enhance teacher commitment and resilience, even during challenging circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic (García-Morales et al., 2023).

In contrast, transactional leadership, which relies on reward and punishment systems, typically yields only short-term compliance rather than genuine, sustained engagement, as it fails to address intrinsic motivational needs (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Similarly, laissez-faire leadership, defined by a lack of direction and involvement, is consistently linked to role ambiguity, teacher stress, and disengagement, posing significant risks in the complex setting of international schools (Skogstad et al., 2007). Conversely, servant leadership, with its emphasis on empathy, empowerment, and putting followers' needs first, shows strong positive correlations with teacher satisfaction and organisational commitment (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008). Beyond specific leadership styles, the literature highlights that leadership effectiveness and subsequent teacher engagement can be enhanced through continuous professional development, reflective practice, coaching, and the cultivation of collaborative, trusting school cultures (Harris & Jones, 2023). This synthesis underscores the necessity for adaptive, supportive, and reflective leadership practices to meet the unique challenges and leverage the opportunities within international school environments.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, inductive research design grounded in an interpretivist philosophy to explore the subjective experiences of teachers (Clark et al., 2021). A case study approach was used, focusing on three international schools under the Diocese of Colombo. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich, insightful data on leadership and engagement. The sample comprised five experienced teachers and school leaders from each of three international schools, representing primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and advanced levels. This strategic composition captures a broader range of contextual factors, thereby strengthening the study's transferability. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis. This methodology allowed for a deep, nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between leadership practices and teacher engagement within this specific environment.

Research Findings

This study reveals profound insights into how leadership styles impact teacher engagement within international schools under the Diocese of Colombo. The analysis of qualitative data from 15 participants identified three central themes that illuminate both the current challenges and potential pathways to improvement.

The research demonstrates that authoritative leadership predominates in these institutions, characterised by controlling behaviours, strict supervision, and limited professional autonomy (Figure1). Teachers consistently described this approach as fundamentally demotivating, citing micromanagement, inadequate support systems, and absence of meaningful recognition as primary factors diminishing their engagement. One participant articulated**,** "The constant oversight without trust makes us feel like instruments rather than professionals, leading to emotional detachment from our work." Another participant shared that “without connection and feedback loop, it’s tough to really keep people motivated and involved.”

Conversely, the minority of teachers experiencing transformational leadership reported significantly higher motivation levels, emphasising the importance of inspirational guidance, collaborative decision-making, and intellectual stimulation in fostering commitment. As one participant stated, “Their enthusiasm and support make it a joy to come to work, creating an environment where employees feel valued and excited to contribute.”

Critical barriers to effective leadership engagement were clearly identified. Communication deficiencies emerged as the most significant obstacle, with participants describing ambiguous instructions, infrequent feedback, and top-down information flow that created uncertainty and eroded trust (Figure 2). As one teacher explained, "We operate in a vacuum of information, which makes it impossible to feel genuinely connected to the school's mission." Additional challenges included severe time constraints that prevented meaningful leader-teacher interactions, inadequate resource allocation, and inflexible institutional policies that stifled innovation and professional autonomy.

Participants consistently emphasised five essential leadership qualities for enhancing engagement: transparent communication, genuine empathy, consistent supportiveness, well-developed emotional intelligence, and clear visionary direction. Recommendations for leadership improvement highlighted the urgent need for structured professional development programmes focusing specifically on communication skills, emotional intelligence training, and conflict resolution techniques. Teachers also stressed the importance of implementing formal recognition programmes and establishing collaborative decision-making processes to foster greater ownership and institutional commitment (Figure 3).

The study conclusively demonstrates that transformational leadership practices-particularly through fostering collaboration, articulating a shared vision, and providing inspirational motivation-have the greatest potential to enhance teacher engagement. However, the significant disparity between the prevailing authoritative leadership styles and teachers' expressed needs for more transformative approaches indicates a crucial area for institutional development and leadership training within these international schools.

Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that leadership style is a paramount factor influencing teacher engagement in the international schools of the Diocese of Colombo. The implications of this finding are both theoretical and practical.

Theoretically, the findings substantiate established leadership models, such as transformational and servant leadership, while contextualizing them within the distinctive Sri Lankan educational landscape. This reinforces the cross-cultural applicability of these frameworks.

Practically, this research provides a clear strategic roadmap for school leaders and policymakers. Principal recommendations include adopting a transformative institutional vision; investing in targeted leadership coaching to cultivate emotional intelligence and advanced communication skills; implementing robust professional development and recognition programmes for teachers; and actively fostering a collaborative, trusting, and inclusive school culture. By prioritising these evidence-based strategies, schools can significantly enhance teacher engagement, which in turn leads to improved staff retention, teaching performance, and overall organisational success.

The research holds significant value, as the identification of these critical elements equips school leaders and policymakers with the insights necessary to formulate targeted strategies. These strategies are pivotal for improving engagement, job satisfaction, and overall school effectiveness (Nguyen et al., 2021; García-Morales et al., 2023). The study thereby directly addresses its central question by elucidating the mechanisms through which transformational leadership affects professional commitment within the Diocese of Colombo's international schools.

Keywords

Leadership Styles, Teacher Engagement, International Schools, Transformational Leadership, Qualitative Research.

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THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENHANCING LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN SRI LANKAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction

In contemporary organizational contexts, leadership effectiveness is increasingly recognized as a function of emotional and psychological competencies rather than merely technical or cognitive skills. Emotional Intelligence (EI) defined as the ability to accurately perceive, understand, regulate, and express emotions in oneself and others. (Mayer, 1990))has emerged as a crucial construct in leadership psychology. Emotionally intelligent leaders are known to manage interpersonal relationships more effectively, resolve conflicts constructively, and foster emotionally supportive climates that enhance team motivation and cooperation (Goleman, 1998).While extensive international research supports the positive relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and team outcomes, limited empirical evidence exists within the Sri Lankan corporate sector. This research gap is particularly significant given the increasing prevalence of team-based structures and culturally diverse workforces in Sri Lanka, where emotional and relational competencies play a vital role in organizational success. Understanding how EI functions within this socio-cultural context can therefore provide meaningful insights into leadership effectiveness and team dynamics. Moreover, the present study examines the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and team effectiveness in the corporate sector of Sri Lanka, focusing on organizations within the Western Province. By addressing this gap, the study aims to identify which dimensions of emotional intelligence perception, understanding, regulation, and expression most strongly predict positive team outcomes such as collaboration, trust, and performance. The primary research question guiding this investigation is: "How does the leader's emotional intelligence influence team effectiveness in the corporate sector?"

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is widely recognized as a key determinant of effective leadership and team functioning (Goleman, 1998; Mayer, 1990). Emotionally intelligent leaders demonstrate empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness, enabling constructive communication, conflict resolution, and cohesive team relationships (Côté, (2017))Emotional Competence Framework highlights five domains self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills that collectively enhance a leader's ability to influence and inspire others.

The link between EI and leadership effectiveness is reflected in leaders' capacity to foster trust, motivation, and psychological safety within teams. In Sri Lankan corporate settings, particularly in banking, hospitality, and IT sectors, leaders exhibiting high emotional regulation and interpersonal sensitivity promote employee engagement, reduce turnover, and improve collaboration (Ranasinghe, P., Wickramasinghe, S.A., Pieris, W.R.S., Jayawardena, R. and Katulanda, P., 2020.) (Fernando & Ranasinghe, 2020). Cultural values such as collectivism and respect for hierarchy further shape how emotional competencies are expressed and perceived (Sulaiman, 2021)

However, empirical research on how EI influences leadership outcomes within Sri Lanka's corporate context remains limited. This study addresses this gap by integrating emotional intelligence and transformational leadership perspectives to explore how leaders' emotional competencies contribute to team effectiveness, collaboration, and trust in Sri Lankan organizations.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and team effectiveness within corporate organizations in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The sample consisted of 120 participants, randomly selected from three large companies: MAS Holdings (n = 50), Brandix (n = 40), and Ansell (n = 30), representing the finance, information technology, and quality assurance departments in Biyagama. Quantitative data were collected using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002) and a validated Team Effectiveness Questionnaire to assess cohesion, trust, and performance. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten team leaders to explore their experiences with emotion regulation and interpersonal management. Quantitative data were analyzed using correlation and regression analyses, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key emotional and behavioral patterns that influence team dynamics and performance.

Research Findings

The study found a significant positive correlation between leaders' emotional intelligence (EI) and team effectiveness ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$). Teams led by leaders with higher EI demonstrated stronger collaboration, improved communication, and greater trust compared to those led by low-EI leaders. Among Goleman's (1998) five EI domains, empathy and self-regulation were the most influential predictors of team cohesion and conflict resolution.

Interview data supported these findings. One participant commented, "Our manager senses when someone is stressed and checks in before it affects the group." Another observed, "Even in pressure situations, our leader stays calm, which keeps the team focused." Such comments highlight that empathetic leaders promote emotional understanding, while self-regulated leaders maintain psychological safety within teams.

Participants from high-EI teams also described an atmosphere of openness and creativity: "We feel confident sharing ideas because our leader values everyone's input." In contrast, members of low-EI teams reported "poor communication and frequent misunderstandings."

These results confirm that emotional intelligence is a vital psychological resource influencing leadership effectiveness in Sri Lankan organizations. Developing leaders' empathy and self-regulation can strengthen teamwork, trust, and performance, ultimately supporting organizational success.

Conclusion and Implications

This study highlights the critical role of emotional intelligence (EI) in enhancing leadership effectiveness and team performance within Sri Lankan organizations. High EI fosters trust, collaboration, and psychological safety, which in turn strengthen communication, cohesion, and overall productivity. Among the emotional competencies, empathy and self-regulation emerged as key drivers of effective leadership, enabling managers to maintain stability, manage conflict, and build supportive team relationships.For corporate organizations in Sri Lanka, these findings suggest the need to integrate EI development into leadership training and human resource strategies. Companies could implement targeted workshops, coaching sessions, and 360-degree feedback assessments to help leaders identify and strengthen their emotional competencies. Embedding EI-focused modules into management development programs and performance appraisals can further promote emotionally aware leadership cultures.

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the sustained impact of EI training on leadership behaviour, employee well-being, and organizational success. Cross-sectoral studies could also explore how cultural and structural variations influence the application of emotional intelligence across different industries in Sri Lanka. By investing in emotionally intelligent leadership, organizations can cultivate more resilient, motivated, and high-performing teams that contribute to long-term corporate growth.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, leadership, team effectiveness, organisational behaviour, Sri Lankan corporate sector

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE BIDIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND JOB INSECURITY IN COLOMBO PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

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Introduction

Organizations today face continuous change driven by globalization, technology, and competition. While essential for survival, such change often creates uncertainty, shaping how secure employees feel in their jobs. This study investigates the bidirectional relationship between organizational change and job insecurity, seeking to determine which variable exerts greater influence. Prior research has mostly examined this link in one direction, overlooking how employees' insecurity may also provoke change responses within organizations. Drawing on Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1989), this study explains how threats to valued resources such as job stability and trust shape employee behavior and, in turn, organizational dynamics. It further examines the moderating role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) in buffering these effects. The study addresses a significant gap in developing-country contexts, offering practical insights for leaders in Sri Lanka's private education sector to manage change with greater employee stability and trust.

Research Questions-

i) To what extent does organizational change affect employees' perceived job insecurity?

ii)To what extent can job insecurity influence organizational change?

iii) What role does perceived organizational support play in moderating this relationship?

Objectives-

i) To assess the impact of organizational change on job insecurity.

ii) To examine whether job insecurity influences organizational change.

iii) To evaluate the moderating effect of perceived organizational support.

Literature Review

Organizational change is a constant feature of modern workplaces, emerging through restructuring, mergers, and technological adaptation (Burnes, 2017). Although intended to improve efficiency, it often disrupts employees' stability and trust (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Vakola, 2014). Job insecurity, defined as the perceived threat of job loss or reduction in valued job features (De Witte, 2005), arises when employees interpret workplace changes as threats. Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains that threats to valued resources increase stress, while Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1989) highlights how unfulfilled expectations heighten insecurity.

Most research views job insecurity as a consequence of change (Sverke et al., 2002), yet evidence suggests it can also provoke organizational reactions, leading to adaptive or defensive management responses (Probst, 2003). This reciprocal link remains underexplored, particularly in developing contexts. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) moderates both directions, buffering insecurity arising from change and reducing insecurity-driven resistance that may trigger further organizational change (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Stiglbauer et al., 2012).

Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative, positivist, and objectivist approach, assuming that job insecurity and organizational change exist independently and can be measured empirically. A deductive design was used to test hypotheses derived from theory. Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to employees of a private tertiary education provider in Colombo (coded as Organization X). The survey measured Organizational Change (OC), Job Insecurity (JI), and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) using established and validated scales.

A stratified purposive sampling method was applied to ensure representation from academic, administrative, and support departments, recognizing variations in exposure to organizational change. A total of 23 responses were obtained, with participants representing diverse age groups, job levels, and tenure categories. Data were analyzed using SPSS, applying the following techniques- Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha) to ensure internal consistency.

Descriptive Statistics for mean and standard deviation. Correlation Analysis to assess relationships among variables. Regression and Hierarchical Regression to test causal links and moderation effects.

The following hypotheses were tested-

H1a: Organizational change increases job insecurity.

H1b: Job insecurity influences organizational change.

H1c: Perceived organizational support moderates these relationships.

Research Findings

All measurement scales showed strong reliability (OC $\alpha = 0.838$, JI $\alpha = 0.837$, POS $\alpha = 0.947$).

Correlation results were as follows. OC and JI- $r = 0.286$ (weak positive) - when OC goes up, JI also goes up, but the connection is weak. Meaning, when the company makes more changes, employees may feel a little more insecure but the effect is small. Suggesting that any other factors (like leadership, communication, pay, etc.) also influence insecurity.

OC and POS- $r = –0.124$ (no significant relation) - is negative, when OC goes up, POS goes down slightly. This is close to zero showing no relationship. Meaning, the amount of change happening in the company doesn't really affect how much employees feel supported. Some employees feel supported even during big changes, while others don not and hence no clear pattern here.

JI and POS- $r = –0.749$ (strong negative) - is negative, when POS goes up, JI goes down. The number is quite large (close to –1) → this is a strong relationship.

This suggests change slightly increases insecurity, but high support strongly reduces it. Meaning, when employees feel that the company supports them (POS is high), their sense of job insecurity is much lower. On the other hand, if support is low, insecurity goes up. This is the most important finding in the correlation results, it proves that support works like a shield against job insecurity.

Regression findings

Model A: Job Insecurity (DV) ~ Organizational Change (IV), POS (Moderator) Equation- $JI = 2.349 + 0.261(OC) - 0.650(POS) - 0.161(OC \times POS)$

Predictor / Term	Coefficient	p-value	Significance	Explanation
Intercept	2.349	—	—	Baseline job insecurity when OC and POS are zero. Serves as a starting point.
Organizational Change (OC)	0.261	0.176	Not significant	Each one-unit increase in perceived change slightly raises job insecurity, but this effect is **not statistically reliable**.
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	-0.65	0.001	Significant	Each one-unit increase in support **reduces job insecurity by 0.65 units**, a strong and reliable effect.
Interaction: OC × POS	-0.161	0.351	Not significant	POS does **not significantly change** the effect of organizational change on job insecurity.
Model fit (R^2)	0.617	—	—	The model explains about **62% of variation** in job insecurity; support drives most of this effect.

Table 1

Model B: Organizational Change (DV) ~ Job Insecurity (IV), POS (Moderator)

Equation- $OC = 3.458 + 0.185(JI) + 0.134(POS) - 0.369(JI \times POS)$

Predictor / Term	Coefficient	p-value	Significance	Explanation
Intercept	3.458	—	—	Baseline perception of organizational change when JI and POS are zero.
Job Insecurity (JI)	0.185	0.406	Not significant	Each one-unit increase in insecurity slightly increases perception of change, but this effect is **not statistically reliable**.
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	0.134	0.543	Not significant	Support alone does **not significantly affect** perception of change.
Interaction: JI × POS	-0.369	0.01	Significant	POS **moderates the effect** of insecurity on change: high support weakens the negative impact of insecurity.
Model fit (R^2)	0.373	—	—	Model explains about **37% of variation** in perceptions of change; moderation by support is key.

Table 2: *Interpretation – Hypothesis Testing Summary*

H1a- Organizational change increases job insecurity — **Not supported** ($p = 0.176$). Change alone did not make employees feel insecure. (This uses Model A, because in Model A, job insecurity is the dependent variable.)

H1b-Job insecurity influences organizational change - **Not supported** ($p = 0.406$). Insecurity alone did not affect perceptions of change. (This uses Model B, because in Model B, organizational change is the dependent variable.)

H1c- Perceived organizational support moderates the relationship - **Partially Supported** ($p = 0.010$ for JI×POS). Support reduced insecurity and weakened its negative impact on change. Both direct effects were insignificant, but **organizational support played a key protective role**, explaining most of the variation ($R^2 = 0.617$ and 0.373) by lowering insecurity and buffering negative reactions to change. Neither job insecurity nor support alone significantly predicted organizational change perceptions. However, the interaction term was significant, showing that POS moderates the JI → OC relationship. When support is high, the negative effect of job insecurity on change is weaker. When support is low, job insecurity strongly reduces positive views of change. In conclusion, both direct relationships (OC → JI and JI → OC) were not statistically significant. However, POS played a major moderating and protective role, reducing insecurity and buffering its impact on perceptions of change.

Conclusion and Implications

The study shows that the connection between organizational change and job insecurity is not as strong as theory often suggests. Neither factor rises or falls on its own. The effect is shaped by the level of support employees receive within the organization. When people feel valued, informed, and treated with fairness, they handle change with greater confidence. When support is absent, even minor adjustments can create anxiety. For managers, the main lesson is that insecurity does not come from change itself. It comes from how the change is introduced and handled. Clear explanations, steady communication, and early involvement of employees can limit uncertainty. Fair processes, visible leadership presence, and recognition of individual concerns help people remain steady during difficult periods. These practices guide employees through transitions with a sense of purpose rather than fear. Strong organizational support allows managers to turn change into a constructive experience. When trust is maintained, employees are more willing to adapt, and the workplace becomes more resilient. This positions the organization to move through future challenges with greater unity and stability.

Keywords

Keywords: Organizational Change, Job Insecurity, Perceived Organizational Support, Employee Well-being, Conservation of Resources Theory

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THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON MANAGEMENT STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN COLOMBO PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now reshaping higher education by changing how students learn and how lecturers guide them (Ellikkal and Rajamohan, 2024). In management education, AI tools such as virtual tutors, predictive analytics, and automated feedback systems have created new possibilities for improving learning quality and engagement (Zaharuddin, Chen Yu and Yao, 2024). However, while AI is widely adopted, there is still limited understanding of how it truly affects students' level of academic engagement in day-to-day learning (Ma et al., 2025). The background of this study lies in the increasing reliance on AI-driven learning platforms across business and management programmes in Sri Lanka. Many institutions promote AI as a tool for personalized learning and improved outcomes (Elbadiansyah et al., 2024), yet its real impact on students' motivation, participation, and emotional experience remains unclear. Although some global studies examine AI-supported learning, most Sri Lankan research has focused only on system adoption, technology acceptance, or general attitudes toward digital learning, without measuring actual behavioural or emotional engagement outcomes. Prior studies have also not compared how different AI tools influence engagement within management education specifically, nor have they assessed whether students' interaction patterns change over time. This limited empirical evidence forms the research problem, whether AI genuinely enhances student engagement or whether it causes dependency and reduced independent learning (Pandey, 2024; Willingham, 2024). Therefore, this study was conducted to answer three key research questions-

i. How does AI-driven education influence management students' academic engagement?
ii. What emotional factors associated with AI use affect engagement levels?
iii. How does technological self-efficacy contribute to student participation and motivation?

Based on these questions, the objectives of the study are-

i. To examine the impact of AI-driven education on management students' engagement.
ii. To identify how emotional experiences of AI use influence engagement in management students.
iii. To explore the relationship between students' technological self-efficacy and their overall academic involvement.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming management education by offering adaptive and personalized learning opportunities that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Ellikkal and Rajamohan, 2024). According to Ellikkal and Rajamohan (2024), AI tools support self-directed learning by increasing students' autonomy and competence, which are key elements in sustaining motivation. Similarly, Zaharuddin, Chen Yu and Yao (2024) found that AI-driven personalization allows students to receive tailored content and timely feedback, improving attention and academic performance. Although this study does not adopt a single dominant theory because existing engagement theories do not fully capture AI-specific learning behaviours it is conceptually informed by principles found in established frameworks such as autonomy, competence, and motivation (commonly discussed within self-determination perspectives) and the role of perceived usefulness and ease of use in shaping technology engagement (frequently noted in technology-acceptance literature). These theoretical ideas help explain how AI-supported learning can influence students' motivation, behavioural engagement, and emotional responses in management education.

However, the influence of AI is not entirely positive. Dekker et al. (2020) observed that while continuous feedback promotes focus, excessive monitoring can create digital fatigue and stress. Jha (2023) highlighted that over-dependence on AI might weaken students' creativity and interpersonal communication skills. In contrast, Seyum Getenet, Redmond and Albion (2024) confirmed that technological self-efficacy—the confidence to use AI tools—directly improves engagement and participation in online learning environments. Recent research by Ma et al. (2025) and Elbadiansyah et al. (2024) further emphasises that students' emotional stability and adaptability mediate the effectiveness of AI tools in higher education. These findings support the argument that AI can enhance motivation and engagement when implemented thoughtfully. The key challenge lies in balancing technology-assisted learning with human interaction to sustain emotional well-being, critical thinking, and independent problem-solving among management students (Silva, 2023; Pandey, 2024).

Methodology

This study followed a positivist philosophy and deductive quantitative approach (Dekker et al., 2020), as this topic requires objective measurement of relationships between variables and the testing of predefined hypotheses using statistical evidence. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 146 management students from several Sri Lankan higher-education institutions. The study measured four key variables: AI-driven education, emotional factors of AI use, technological self-efficacy, and academic engagement. A simple random sampling technique ensured fair representation. The data were analysed using SPSS software, employing correlation and regression methods to test the hypotheses. Ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and the use of data strictly for academic purposes.

Research Findings

The internal reliability of the instrument was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.884, indicating strong consistency (Seyum Getenet, Redmond and Albion, 2024). This allowed the researcher to obtain clear, statistical insights into the relationships between AI use and student engagement.

Relationship	Pearson's r	Sig. (p-value)	Interpretation
AI-driven education ↔ Academic engagement	0.717	< 0.001	Strong positive correlation
Emotional impact ↔ Academic engagement	0.736	< 0.001	Strongest positive correlation
Technological self-efficacy ↔ Academic engagement	0.565	< 0.001	Moderate positive correlation

Table: 1: Correlation Analysis

Model	R	R^2	Sig. (p-value)	Key finding
AI-driven education → Academic engagement	0.717	0.514	< 0.001	51.4% of variance explained
Emotional impact → Academic engagement	0.736	0.542	< 0.001	54.2% of variance explained
Technological self-efficacy → Academic engagement	0.565	0.32	< 0.001	32.0% of variance explained

Table: 2: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis Testing Explained (Based on Regression Analysis)

To examine whether AI-related factors significantly influence the academic engagement of management students, simple linear regression analysis was conducted for each independent variable. Regression analysis helps to determine how much variation in the dependent variable (academic engagement) can be explained by changes in each independent variable. The B coefficients indicate the direction and magnitude of this effect, while R^2 shows the proportion of variance explained by the model.

All three hypotheses were tested at a 99% confidence level ($p < 0.001$), confirming statistically significant relationships.

Hypothesis 1 (H1a)

There is a significant relationship between AI-driven education and academic engagement.

- B (Unstandardized Coefficient): 0.681
- R^2: 0.514
- p-value: < 0.001
- Regression

  Equation

  Academic Engagement = 1.137 + 0.681(AI-driven education)

Interpretation

The coefficient (B = 0.681) means that for every one-unit increase in AI-driven education, the level of academic engagement increases by 0.681 units, assuming other factors remain constant. The R^2 value of 0.514 shows that AI-driven education explains 51.4% of the variation in student engagement. The p-value (< 0.001) confirms that this effect is statistically significant.

Therefore, H1a is accepted, proving that AI-based learning environments significantly enhance student engagement through personalization and adaptive feedback.

Hypothesis 2 (H1b)

There is a significant relationship between emotional factors of AI and academic engagement.

- B (Unstandardized Coefficient): 0.669
- R^2: 0.542
- p-value: < 0.001
- Regression

  Equation
  Academic Engagement = 1.651 + 0.669(Emotional factors)

Interpretation

The coefficient (B = 0.669) shows that for every one-unit increase in positive emotional experience with AI (such as confidence, reduced stress, or motivation), academic engagement increases by 0.669 units. With $R^2 = 0.542$, emotional factors explain 54.2% of the changes in engagement. This makes emotional impact the strongest predictor among the three variables.

Thus, H1b is accepted, confirming that emotional satisfaction and confidence gained through AI tools play a vital role in keeping management students motivated and engaged.

Hypothesis 3 (H1c)

There is a significant relationship between technological self-efficacy and academic engagement.

- B (Unstandardized Coefficient): 0.542
- R^2: 0.320
- p-value: < 0.001
- Regression

  Equation
  Academic Engagement = 1.644 + 0.542(Technological self-efficacy)

Interpretation

The coefficient (B = 0.542) means that for each one-unit increase in students' technological self-efficacy, academic engagement rises by 0.542 units. The R^2 value of 0.320 shows that technological confidence accounts for 32% of the variation in engagement. Although this effect is statistically significant, its impact is weaker compared to the other two factors. Therefore, H1c is accepted, indicating that while confidence in using AI tools boosts engagement, its effect is smaller because not all students use technology with the same level of consistency or independence.

Overall Interpretation

All three hypotheses (H1a, H1b, and H1c) were supported by the regression models, as all p-values were below 0.01. The analysis shows that AI-driven learning, emotional satisfaction, and technological confidence each contribute positively to academic engagement. Among these, emotional impact ($R^2 = 0.542$) emerged as the most influential factor, followed by AI-driven education ($R^2 = 0.514$) and technological self-efficacy ($R^2 = 0.320$).

This means that when management students use AI in a way that builds positive emotions and confidence, their engagement increases significantly. However, the study also highlights the importance of balancing AI use with traditional teaching to preserve independent thinking and reduce over-dependence on technology.

Conclusion and Implications

This study confirms that Artificial Intelligence (AI) positively influences the academic engagement of management students. Regression analysis showed that all three AI-related factors—AI-driven education, emotional experiences, and technological self-efficacy—significantly predict students' engagement levels, with emotional factors emerging as the strongest predictor ($R^2 = 0.542$), followed by AI-driven education ($R^2 = 0.514$) and technological self-efficacy ($R^2 = 0.320$) (Ellikkal and Rajamohan, 2024; Zaharuddin, Chen Yu and Yao, 2024). This indicates that students who feel emotionally supported and confident when using AI tools are more attentive, motivated, and committed to their studies (Ma et al., 2025).

The findings add to existing scholarship by demonstrating that emotional experiences and self-efficacy are central mechanisms through which AI influences engagement in management education. The results also extend prior studies by providing empirical evidence from Sri Lanka, where limited research has measured how AI-driven learning environments shape behavioural and emotional engagement (Pandey, 2024; Willingham, 2024). The study implies that universities and lecturers should integrate AI carefully to create balanced and meaningful learning experiences. Institutions can conduct AI awareness and training workshops to help students and educators understand how to use these tools effectively (Elbadiansyah et al., 2024). Educators should also combine AI-based personalization with interactive teaching to sustain critical thinking and creativity. Additionally, digital well-being initiatives can help prevent stress or dependency caused by excessive screen time (Silva, 2023). Finally by applying these practices, higher education institutions can strengthen student engagement, build confidence, and prepare management students for data-driven corporate environments. Future research could extend this study by conducting longitudinal analyses or comparing engagement patterns across different academic disciplines.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Academic Engagement, Management Education, Technological Self-Efficacy, Colombo Private Higher Education

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THE "DARK TRIAD" IN THE BOARDROOM: THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE PSYCHOPATHS ON FIRM INTEGRITY WITH MEDIATING IMPACT OF AUDITOR'S SATISFACTION

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Introduction

Recent studies in the field of organizational behaviour emphasize that the negative aspect of personality traits of leaders, especially, psychopathy, as one of the elements of the Dark Triad, compromises ethical climates, encourages counterproductive behaviour, and changes stakeholder relationships. Dark Triad traits of leaders are related to misbehaviour in the workplace and shifted auditor judgements (Baloch *et al.*, 2017; Hobson, Stern and Zimbelman, 2020). The existence of parallels in accounting and corporate-governance literature shows that firm-level integrity and ethical culture, operationalized in terms of systemic internal controls, compliance mechanisms, and corporate ethical virtues are key factors in non-compliance detection and non-compliance mitigation at the financial and operational level, as well as in influencing the judgments of auditors (Berjillos *et al.*, 2025).

The studies which examine the decision-making of auditors additionally suggest that the managerial ethical signals and organizational culture play a vital role in influencing auditors to be professional sceptics and feel satisfied with client relationship (Mappisabbi, Batti and Natsir, 2025). However, limited studies have specifically examined the impact of corporate psychopaths on auditors' job satisfaction and firm integrity, particularly in the unique context of Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between corporate psychopathy and job satisfaction with the mediating impact of firm integrity.

The significance of understanding such a pathway in behaviour is that auditor satisfaction is a determinant of the audit quality, transparency of reporting and stakeholder trust, which are important determinants of firm value and compliance (Mappisabbi, Batti and Natsir, 2025). The study combines both behavioural and control orientations by considering auditor satisfaction as an intermediary, to explicate how toxic leadership undermines integrity of companies.

The research questions of this study are: Do the corporate psychopaths in senior management have an adverse impact on auditor satisfaction (H1) and firm integrity (H2) and does auditor satisfaction mediate the relationship between the Corporate Psychopaths and Firm Integrity (H3).

Literature Review

Recent changes in Sri Lanka focus on a flexible legal environment that promotes active auditing exercises and governance measures, which will facilitate organizations to overcome the tricky business environment. Corporate psychopaths form a sub-range of the people in positions of leadership who are devoid of empathy, are manipulative in nature and they use cunning methods to attain their own selfish interests. According to this literature, corporate psychopaths have negative behaviours that may undermine corporate integrity and governance of organizations (Schwenkenbecher, 2024) .

A high satisfaction of the auditors is linked to the improved performance and the increased accuracy in the financial reporting, and the decrease in auditor satisfaction can result in the suboptimal performance and the increased likelihood of oversight. Studies show that environmental aspects, such as leadership behaviour and organisational climate, have a great impact on auditor job satisfaction. Here, the corporate psychopaths by virtue of being abusive supervisors can undermine the auditor satisfaction and consequently, the audit quality (Nia *et al.*, 2021).

Firm integrity is established as a compliance to the ethical standards and regulatory compliance in financial reporting and corporate activities. Unethical leadership which is in most cases through corporate psychopaths can greatly undermine the integrity of the firm since it provides room over which fraud and manipulative practices can be executed (Busila, 2024). The association of low satisfaction of auditors with low corporate governance eventually creates a risk to the long-term sustainability of companies and the loss of investor trust (Laurijssen *et al.*, 2023).

Further this study is highly relevant to Sri Lanka, that actively working to strengthen its auditing and corporate governance framework following economic instability.

Regulatory bodies like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants (CA Sri Lanka) are key players in enforcing high standards of firm integrity and auditor professional scepticism.

Methodology

Quantitative research design was employed, which involves the use of structured survey questionnaire in collecting data from external auditors in the Big 4 audit firms in Sri Lanka, and the sampling method is convenience sampling since there is no list of auditors which is publicly available. The questionnaire is based on three key constructs as, Corporate Psychopaths of Senior Management: Independent variable

Auditor's Satisfaction: Mediating variable

Firm Integrity: Dependent variable

All ethical protocols were strictly followed. This included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring their right to withdraw, and guaranteeing full anonymity and data confidentiality throughout the research process to protect respondent privacy and integrity.

The B -scan 360 and the PCL-R, which are scales that measure the four dimensions of corporate psychopathy, manipulativeness, callousness, unreliability, and intimidation, were used to measure corporate psychopathic traits. The B-Scan 360 was selected for its specific design to measure psychopathic traits in corporate settings via observer ratings, making it highly relevant. Its use aligns with contemporary research seeking to identify psychopathy in leadership, ensuring construct validity for this context. A valid measure of job satisfaction was based on the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) which is a complete evaluation of different factors leading to job satisfaction. Corporate Ethical Virtues Model and Scale developed by Kaptein (2008) was used in the measurement of firm integrity.

Two hundred and eighty-eight responses were obtained, analysis was performed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The hypothesis testing using bootstrapping, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics were done using the Smart PLS statistical software package.

Findings

Descriptive Analysis

The demographic profile shows the even distribution with regard to the experience, with most of the respondents having a higher than five years of experience in auditing. The initial descriptive statistics indicate that there is a variability in the perceptions of the existence of corporate psychopaths, on the one hand, and the contentedness of the auditors and the integrity of the firms, on the other hand (Table 01).

Construct	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Corporate Psychopaths (CPSM)	3.65	0.82
Auditor Satisfaction (AS)	3.42	0.76
Firm Integrity (FI)	3.78	0.68

Table 01: Descriptive Statistics for Key Constructs

These results reveal a moderate degree of perceived unethical leadership and suggest the areas where the auditor satisfaction and firm integrity may be possibly undermined.

Measurement Model Evaluation. All types of constructs had satisfactory levels of convergent and discriminant validity as proved by a confirmatory factor analysis.

(CFA). The alpha coefficients of the constructed measures were greater than 0.70 which verified internal consistency.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

PLS-SEM was used to test the structural model. The result of the analysis showed that there is a high negative correlation between the existence of corporate psychopaths in the top management and the satisfaction of the auditors (b= -0.42, p= less than 0.01). This implies that the greater the perception of an unethical leadership, the less auditor satisfaction one has. Auditor satisfaction had a positive relationship with firm integrity (b=0.38, p= <0.01) and indicated that the greater the job satisfaction among auditors, the better they report their financial results and engage in ethical business practices. It was found through a mediation analysis that auditor satisfaction mediated the correlation between corporate psychopaths and firm integrity in part; the mediating effect of corporate psychopaths on firm integrity through the mediation of auditor satisfaction was significant ($b = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 02: summarizes the structural model path coefficients along with their significance levels:

Hypothesized Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance Level
Corporate Psychopaths → Auditor Satisfaction	-0.42	<0.01	Highly Significant
Auditor Satisfaction → Firm Integrity	0.38	<0.01	Highly Significant
Indirect Effect (Mediation): CPSM → AS → FI	-0.16	<0.05	Significant

Table 02: Structural Model Path Coefficients and Significance Levels

As Table 02, the correlation between corporate psychopaths and the level of auditor satisfaction creates a harm to the integrity of the firms, which is consistent with the results of Raineri and Cartes (2024). A subgroup analysis was performed on the potential variations among different demographic groups (e.g., years of experience, firm size, and geographic location in Sri Lanka). The analysis revealed that the auditors who had more than ten years' experience reported more negative impact by reported cases of corporate psychopaths than the less experienced auditors. Also, the firms in the Colombo metropolitan territory showed a little more of firm integrity than the ones in secondary cities, which indicates the presence of regional disparities in the sphere of governance.

Conclusion and Implications

This research concludes that corporate psychopaths in the top management have a major role of undermining the integrity of firms both directly and indirectly through their diminutive role in the auditor satisfaction. The results indicate the presence of a critical behavioural pathway: the negative effects of toxic leadership devalue job satisfaction of auditors consequently reducing the quality of audits and undermining the ethical corporate behaviours. To operationalize these findings, firms should incorporate validated psychometric assessments, such as the B-Scan 360, into executive recruitment and promotion processes. Future research should longitudinally track the efficacy of such screening tools and explore the role of robust whistleblowing mechanisms in mitigating the influence of toxic leaders.

To regulators and firms, this highlights the importance of filtering dark triad traits of leaders during the selection process and enhancing governance to prevent the audit functions being exposed to manipulative influence. The substantial mediation coefficient indicates that taking care of auditor well-being is not only an HR issue but also an important corporate governance mechanism. Finally, the promotion of the ethical culture that discourages psychopathic leaders is the key to maintaining financial reporting integrity and stakeholder trust.

Key Words:
Auditor, Firm Integrity, Job Satisfaction, Psychopathy, Sri Lanka

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ASSESSING THE RISK AND RETURN CHARACTERISTICS OF CRYPTOCURRENCIES WITHIN THE SRI LANKAN FINANCIAL MARKET

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Introduction

In Sri Lanka, the investment profile depends on traditional, low-risk assets such as bank deposits, treasury bills and gold. Furthermore, the Sri Lankan economy has experienced high inflation, currency depreciation and a debt crisis in recent years. These conditions have increased investor interest in alternative assets, such as cryptocurrencies. However, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL 2023) does not recognise cryptocurrencies as legal tender and has repeatedly warned the public about the associated risks. This makes it essential to empirically evaluate the performance and risk characteristics of cryptocurrencies before they can be considered for portfolio construction. Despite the global expansion of empirical research on cryptocurrency behaviour there is a clear lack of such evidence within the Sri Lankan context. Existing studies in Sri Lanka primarily only focus on investor perceptions and regulatory awareness, rather than on quantitative analysis of cryptocurrency performance. This absence of data-driven evidence creates a significant gap for investors. This study therefore aims to conduct an empirical analysis of the risk–return trade-off of cryptocurrencies compared with traditional asset classes such as Equity and Treasury Bills in the Sri Lankan financial market.

Research hypotheses:

H1: Cryptocurrencies exhibit significantly higher risk and returns than investing traditional Sri Lankan asset classes.

H2: Cryptocurrencies demonstrate low or insignificant correlation with traditional Sri Lankan assets.

Literature Review

In modern finance, the risk–return trade-off is centralised, whereby higher expected returns can compensate for greater risk (Markowitz, 1952). Modern portfolio theory has been extended to include unconventional assets such as cryptocurrencies, to evaluate their contribution to portfolio risk and return, and to ascertain whether they can act as diversifiers or hedges in different markets. Cryptocurrencies have significant characteristics compared to other traditional assets such as high volatility, extreme returns and having correlation patterns with other assets classes.

Several studies have found that Bitcoin can act as a diversifier, and act as a hedge against specific currencies or markets (Dyhrberg, 2016; Urquhart, 2019). Some research has identified that cryptocurrencies can provide diversification benefits within a crypto-only investment portfolio and can sometimes reduce risk when added to other portfolios, (Liu, 2019; Bouri et al., 2020). To analyse cryptocurrency behaviour, most researchers use various methods, such as time-series models to measure volatility and co-movement, and correlation and cointegration tests to measure safe-haven behaviour. Further, researchers use portfolio optimisation (Sharpe ratio, Sortino ratio) metrics during the extreme market events to assess diversification impacts.

Although global studies provide valuable insights, Sri Lanka's financial system is characterised by limited market depth, a high concentration of low-risk assets and restricted diversification options. Previous studies in Sri Lanka have examined investor perception, adoption and behavioural factors of crypto investment rather than making long-term risk-return comparisons. Furthermore, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has issued multiple warnings regarding the risks associated with crypto assets, and there is currently no formal regulatory framework in place to govern their use. Due to the significant financial, operational, legal and security risks associated with cryptocurrencies in Sri Lanka, investors tend to be cautious and reluctant to allocate funds to this asset class (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023).

Given these differences, global findings cannot be directly applied to Sri Lanka without local empirical testing. Evidence from emerging economies suggests that, due to weak financial markets, currency depreciation and limited access to international assets, cryptocurrencies can provide diversification advantages (Bouri et al., 2017).

Methodology

As the analysis relies on numerical data, a quantitative research approach is used for the study. The research objectives are to evaluate historical price data, compare asset performance and test hypotheses about volatility, correlations and portfolio optimisation.

Research Design and Data Sources

The research design is based on the analysis of secondary data, Daily and monthly closing prices of Bitcoin (BTC) and Ethereum (ETH) were obtained from market databases including Yahoo Finance, Coin Market Cap, and Investing.com. Data on Sri Lankan traditional assets—such as the CSE All Share Price Index (ASPI) and Treasury bill were obtained from the Colombo Stock Exchange, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

Time period

The study covers a five-year period from 2020 to 2024, highlighting both extreme and normal market conditions. The timeframe includes significant global and local events, such as the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (2020–2021) and the Sri Lankan economic and sovereign debt crisis of 2022. This allows the study to capture asset performance during both normal and crisis conditions, which is essential to understand the risk–return behaviour.

Data Analysis Methods

The analysis involves calculating daily and monthly returns and risk, followed by measures of volatility, standard deviation, and the Sharpe ratio to assess risk-adjusted performance. Correlation analysis examines movements between cryptocurrencies and traditional assets to provide insights into potential diversification benefits.

Research Findings

Descriptive Statistics: Risk–Return Comparison (Annexure 1)

In 2022, Ethereum and Bitcoin earned the highest returns, alongside strong corresponding Sharpe ratios. A positive Sharpe ratio indicates that returns exceeded risk. Furthermore, both currencies experienced losses in 2021, 2023, and 2024, which were years of high risk with poor risk-adjusted performance.

In contrast, the Sri Lankan equity market showed moderate volatility relative to cryptocurrencies, with annual returns ranging from 22.5% to 55%. Positive returns were recorded in 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2024, with the highest return of 80.48% and a Sharpe ratio of 2.28 occurring in 2021. Furthermore, Sri Lankan 3-month Treasury Bills showed extreme variation in returns and volatility. 2022 was a period of economic instability in Sri Lanka, with extreme volatility in both T-Bills and the CSE, coinciding with very high returns in cryptocurrencies.

These findings reveal the risk dynamics of an emerging market that experienced a foreign exchange crisis in 2022, creating significant short-term volatility. Investors should also consider diversifying into modern assets, such as cryptocurrencies, to minimise risk (Dyhrberg, 2016; Urquhart, 2019).

Correlation Analysis (Annexure 2)

A correlation analysis was conducted to further explore the co-movement between asset classes and examine the relationship between cryptocurrencies and Sri Lanka's traditional financial assets.

Weak negative correlations can be observed between cryptocurrencies and Sri Lankan traditional assets. This is because factors such as monetary and fiscal policy, which directly influence stocks and T-Bills, are no longer considered when valuing cryptocurrencies (Auer & Claessens, 2018).

The moderately negative correlation between the CSE and Treasury Bills ($r = -0.47$) reflects the traditional practice of prioritising safety when investing. In 2022, Sri Lanka experienced sovereign debt pressures and currency depreciation, resulting in a downturn in the equity market and an increase in Treasury yields.

The overall correlation structure highlights those cryptocurrencies operate largely outside Sri Lanka's domestic financial system. Their weak or negative correlation with both equities and Treasury bills suggests that they could offer investors potential risk diversification advantages.

Conclusion and Implications

The study examined the performance of major cryptocurrencies relative to traditional Sri Lankan asset classes. Based on the empirical results, hypotheses H1 and H2 were supported, as cryptocurrencies displayed higher volatility and moderate returns than traditional asset classes, and there were weak correlations.

These findings will help investors recognise that cryptocurrency can be an effective diversification tool. Also provide a foundation for future academic research on digital currencies. Furthermore, policymakers can implement regulatory frameworks to encourage the identification of digital currencies within the financial system.

Based on these findings, incorporating cryptocurrencies into Sri Lankan portfolios could encourage financial innovation and strengthen the infrastructure of the digital asset market. Furthermore, the low correlation between cryptocurrencies and traditional assets could facilitate the development of more sophisticated investment products in the financial market, as combining assets in this way would help to reduce risk, increase returns, and improve protection.

(Annexure1)

Keywords

Cryptocurrency, Risk–Return Analysis, Portfolio Diversification, Correlation Analysis, Modern Portfolio Theory

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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PROFIT PERCEPTION OF SMALL ENTERPRISES: PUTTALAM DISTRICT IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

In Sri Lanka, small enterprises play an essential role in contributing to the national economy, accounting for 45% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and providing employment for about 80% of the workforce (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023). However, despite their significance, many small-scale entrepreneurs face substantial challenges that hinder their profit and long-term viability. According to information provided by the Small Enterprises Development Division (SEDD), a key government institution, there are 14,302 registered small enterprises in the Puttalam District. However, over 58% of small business owners earn a small amount of monthly profit, highlighting the financial struggles within this sector (SEDD, 2024). This low-profit margin raises concerns about business sustainability, as many entrepreneurs eventually lose interest and abandon their ventures due to persistent financial difficulties. By considering this gap, the study is carried out with below objectives. Here, the increased dominance of social media and online marketing presents a possible solution through which small businesses can improve their presence, earn new clientele, and increase profitability. Thus, the research aims to investigate the effect of social media usage on the profit perception of small businesses in the Puttalam.

Research Objectives

1. To study the impact of the types of social media platforms used by small enterprises on their profit perception in Puttalam.
2. To study the impact of the usage of social media platforms on profit perception of small enterprises in Puttalam.
3. To study the impact of social media platform features on profit perception of small enterprises in Puttalam.

4. To study the impact of awareness of social media platforms on profit perception of small enterprises in Puttalam.

Literature Review

In a changing market, the ability of entrepreneurs to effectively use social media platforms to connect with consumers and facilitate the smooth running of their businesses is key to the promotion of profit and sustainability in the field of small-scale businesses (Fajobi, 2023). Different types of social media platforms enable companies to promote products, attract new employees, and communicate with customers (Kalinová & Kovaříková, 2023). Social media features are the channels and mechanisms of social media that allow dialogue, interaction, and information sharing (Tanty Oktavia et al., 2019). Awareness of social media's importance in entrepreneurship varies, with some studies indicating a need for more education and training in digital entrepreneurship (Buja, 2023).

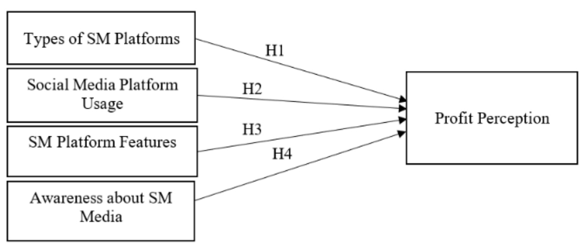
The present study links with two theories, as Social Capital Theory and the Customer Engagement theory. Social capital theory suggests that relationships and networks among people are valuable resources for social interactions (Balijepally, Mahapatra & Nerur, 2004). This theory focuses on connections and relationships, setting it apart from human capital, which relates to individual skills and knowledge. Customer Engagement theory focuses on the interactions between businesses and customers. It highlights how social media can facilitate deeper customer relationships, leading to greater customer loyalty and, ultimately, improved profitability. Engagement is influenced by how involved customers feel, which can result in greater loyalty (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021).

The literature review reveals social media as one of the driving forces of entrepreneurial success by increasing networking, communication, and customer interaction. This study uses Social Capital Theory and Customer Engagement Theory to consider social media as an avenue where relational ties and interactive engagement are bridged to the perception of profit. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of empirical evidence in the setting of Sri Lanka and especially among small businesses in the Puttalam District. In this way, the present study fills this gap because it explores how the use of social media affects the perception of profit among entrepreneurs, making a contribution both to theoretical and practical knowledge about digital entrepreneurship.

Methodology

Based on the reviewed literature, the conceptual framework and hypotheses were developed, and the conceptual framework is mentioned below.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author Constructed

Hypotheses

H_1: There is an impact of social media platform types on the profit perception of small enterprises.

H_2: There is an impact of social media platform usage on the profit perception of small enterprises.

H_3: There is an impact of social media platform features on the profit perception of small enterprises.

H_4: There is an impact of awareness about social media platforms on the profit perception of small enterprises.

The research philosophy guiding this study is positivism, and the study adopts the deductive approach. The study employs a survey strategy to collect the primary data by utilizing adapted, structured questionnaires. A pilot test was conducted with a small group to refine the questionnaire. The population for this study consists of small-scale entrepreneurs in the Puttalam District of Sri Lanka, and a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling, was employed with a sample size of 384. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose respondents who will be directly related to the research objectives. The data was analyzed by using the SPSS 23rd version. Normality test, reliability test, validity test, and multicollinearity test were conducted before testing the hypotheses. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. Highest ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process.

Research Findings

Reliability analysis was conducted with the pilot test, and reliability was there since Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.7. With the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, normality was confirmed. Reliability and validity were established through exceeding 0.8 Cronbach's alpha values, indicating internal consistency. According to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, all four dependent and independent variables have taken more than 0.6 and which indicates an adequate sample for this study. Multicollinearity was tested with tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF), and the results indicate no excessive correlation among independent variables (tolerance >0.25, VIF <4). Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationships between variables, and multiple regression analysis was employed to quantify the impact of independent variables on profit perception. These results of the correlation analysis suggest that all independent variables have a statistically significant relationship with profit perception. Multiple regression analysis yielded an R^2 value of 0.834, indicating that all independent variables collectively explain 83.4% of the variance in profit perception.

The regression equation is as follows: PP=0.132+0.135TSM+0.203USM+0.271FSM+.310ASM

Awareness of social media platforms exhibited the strongest impact, followed by features of social media platforms, usage of social media platforms, and types of social media platforms which means that more highly aware entrepreneurs are able to identify the right platform and use it strategically to help their business develop. The F statistic is 20.181, and the significance refers to 0.000 (<0.05). Consequently, the independent variables may predict changes in the dependent variable, and the regression model has been confirmed. The results of the correlation analysis and regression analysis supported all the developed hypotheses of the present study, and therefore, all hypotheses were accepted.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study are consistent with existing literature, reaffirming the importance of social media in profit perception of small enterprises. Awareness of social media platforms emerged as the most significant predictor for profit perception, highlighting the importance of continuously updated knowledge. Types of social media platforms, usage of social media platforms, and features of social media platforms also affect the profit perception of small enterprises in Puttalam significantly. Accordingly, this outcome demonstrates that the study successfully met its initially defined objectives.

Given the diverse nature of platforms, small enterprises must prioritize those that align with their product offerings and customer preferences. In addition to selecting the right platforms, they should establish clear social media usage strategies that emphasize quality. Familiarity with tools such as analytics, targeted advertising, and customer segmentation can empower small enterprises. To further support these efforts, policymakers should consider implementing educational programs and workshops aimed at improving social media literacy among small enterprises. The study is limited by its small sample size, geographic scope, and specific context. Therefore, future research could consider these points. Further, future research could explore additional social media-related variables, such as the impact of social media marketing strategies, etc. Comprehensively, this paper has revealed that digital competency and awareness of social media are essential drivers of profitability, competitiveness, and sustainability of small businesses.

Keywords

Keywords: Profit perception, Small enterprises, Social media

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THE IMPACT OF BUY-NOW-PAY-LATER USAGE ON FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND FINANCIAL LITERACY AMONG SRI LANKAN CONSUMERS

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Introduction

Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) adoption rates swiftly increased in online marketplaces (Aalders, 2023; Stuijfzand *et al.,* 2023; Threadgold, et al. 2025). It penetrated into individual and household financial decision-making (Cook *et al.,* 2023; Adkins 2018). Along with rapid popularity, negative attributes connected to BNPL have emerged from global statistics. Directly, as a consequence of the availability and convenience of BNPL, users have been found to (a) overspend more through BNPL (impulse buying), that they would have chosen to spend usually (Bedi, 2024; Stuijfzand *et al.,* 2023), (b) miscalculate financial installment payments, leading to unanticipated indebtedness (Bedi, 2024; Cornelli *et al.,* 2023). Comparatively, BNPL adoption was slower in Sri Lanka although adoption by Gen Z users resonates global statistics (Colombage, 2024). Evidence consistently shows that the accessibility and convenience of BNPL encourages impulse buying globally and in Sri Lanka (Jayarathna and Mirando, 2025; Hoo et al., 2025; Waliszewski, et al., 2024). However, while BNPL's influence on purchasing behaviour is established among Sri Lankan consumers, no studies examine the financial consequences beyond impulse buying; leaving a research gap. Since global studies position impulse buying as a prequel to financial mismanagement (overspending and indebtedness), this study becomes imperative in understanding how BNPL affects financial outcomes in Sri Lanka. Hence, the objective of this study is to understand if BNPL consumer behaviour has caused financial mismanagement (overspending and indebtedness) within Sri Lankan consumers, and to ascertain if there is an association to financial literacy.

Literature Review

BNPL is primarily targeted at Gen Z customers (Hoo *et al.,* 2025; Bedi 2024; Colombage, 2024), and attributed fast adoption to the convenience and usefulness

(Akana, 2022; Chawla & Joshi, 2020; Cook *et al.,* 2023). Globally, there seems to be a positive relationship between BNPL adoption and financial mismanagement outcomes. Initially smaller installments, obscures the true cost of the purchase, thereby misleading consumers to overspend beyond what they can afford (Hoo *et al.,* 2025). Eventually resulting in indebtedness where consumers depend on future income to satisfy current needs and wants (Waliszewski, *et al.,* 2024). Cornelli et al., (2023), found BNPL users in the USA are highly indebted on average that non-users. In 2024, Malaysia recorded a 4% overdue on payments for BNPL transactions among a 2.9 million active BNPL users (Bedi, 2024). Almost 25% users incurred debt in Poland (Waliszewski, *et al.,* 2024). UK recorded an average monthly debt of £1.7bn on BNPL purchases, (Ungoed-Thomas, 2024). Literature from other European countries, and Asian countries like Bangladesh were similar. The statistics indicate an unquestionable state of indebtedness, disguised by impulse buying (Hoo *et al.,* 2025). Along the same theme, Generation Z BNPL users are considered more susceptible to debt due to lower financial literacy (Waliszewski, *et al.,* 2024). While adoption rates in Sri Lanka are high (Colombage, 2024; Jayarathna and Mirando, 2025), whether this leads to financial mismanagement, is yet to be uncovered.

Among others, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a strong ground in understanding purchase behaviour (specifically impulse buying) and financial mismanagement, where the theory uses attitudes, subjective peer norms, and perceived control over one's behaviour. Research by Waliszewski, *et al.,* (2024) and Relja *et al*. (2023), concludes that financially less literate users tend to have increased adoption of BNPL usage as well as a tendency to overspend, resulting in financial mismanagement.

Methodology

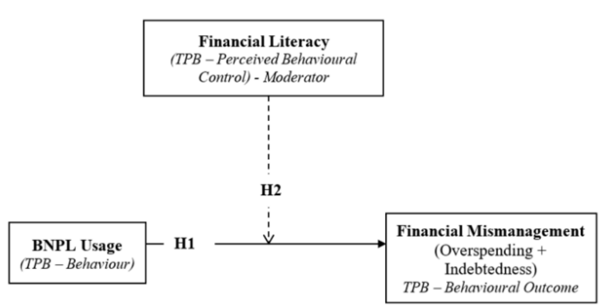
This study adopts a quantitative methodology, following a deductive approach, to test the hypothesis derived from TPB. No evidence in literature reveals the number of registered BNPL users in Sri Lanka which is the population. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size determination, a minimum sample size of 250 respondents was targeted.

Data collection used a structured questionnaire using 5-point Likert-scale statements to measure key constructs.

Instrument validated through expert review and pilot test, ensuring clarity and reliability. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured while no personal financial data was collected. The questionnaire was distributed using the snowball sampling technique ensuring respondents were indeed BNPL users, and yielded 238 valid responses forming the final sample.
Data was analysed using the SPSS-equivalent statistical procedures. Pearson Correlation was used to test the associations for Hypothesis 1. A simple linear regression assessed the effects between BNPL and Financial Mismanagement (H2) and moderation was examined through interaction modelling (H3). These rigorous processes enabled to thoroughly evaluate the hypotheses and provide empirical data on this study in the Sri Lankan context.

Conceptual Framework

Source: Author Developed



H1 – BNPL Usage has a positive association with Financial Mismanagement (overspending and indebtedness) among Sri Lankan users

H2 – Financial Literacy has a negative relationship with Financial Mismanagement

H3 – Moderation Hypothesis – Financial Literacy moderates the relationship between BNPL Usage and Financial Mismanagement, such that the relationship is weaker among consumers with high financial literacy.

The hypotheses are grounded in TPB which explains how individual actions and perceived control can result in behavioural outcomes.

Findings

H1- $r=0.12$ showing a weak positive relationship between BNPL usage and Financial Mismanagement, where the effect is weak and statistically insignificant ($p < .05$). Conclusively, BNPL alone can not influence negative financial outcomes among Sri Lankan users. Respondents majority being employed, urban-based and financially literate, may have contributed to this weak association.

H2 indicated a moderate negative relationship (r=-0.4), where higher Financial Literacy reduces Financial Mismanagement. With 75% respondents in the upper quartile, they are categorically financially literate.

H3 also shows a weak moderation effect (r=0.12) indicating that financial literacy does not significantly alter the BNPL-Mismanagement association (H1 already weak).

The findings drastically defer from global findings of BNPL studies. Though literature (Sri Lanka and global) showed a direct relationship between impulse purchases and BNPL Usage (Jayarathna and Mirando, 2025; Hoo et al., 2025; Waliszewski, et al., 2024), this study does not derive a positive relationship that leads to financial mismanagement.

From a theoretical perspective, Financial Literacy seems to play the dominant role in shaping the behavioural outcomes, explaining the relative low mismanagement. Moreover, BNPL users seem to possess higher financial literacy to moderate a negative impact, showing higher 'perceived behavioural control' consisted with the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Looking outward, Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis may have reformed spending patterns, and provided awareness on financial instability and impulse control. This may have influenced more responsible BNPL usage, resulting in weaker associations between BNPL Usage and Financial Mismanagement.

Measurable limitations may include self-assessments understating own negative financial behaviours as well as mis-judgement of own financial literacy. Social desirability may have led respondents to under-report missed payments of budgeting challenges, resulting in weaker correlations.

Additionally, BNPL Apps like MintPay and Koko in Sri Lanka maintain controlled credit limits, increasing with timely pay backs, which enforces users to complete payments, further contributing to the weaker correlations.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between BNPL Usage and Financial Mismanagement, finding only a weak association; which suggests BNPL may not result in negative financial outcomes among Sri Lankan users. Financial Literacy seemed the dominant predictor of responsible financial behaviour than behavioural intent. Theoretically this extends TPB within the BNPL consumer behaviour context.

Current practical controls of BNPL usage seem to be effective in mitigating Financial Mismanagement. Nevertheless, the study reinforces the importance of strengthening financial education and maintaining the credit-limit mechanisms used by local BNPL providers. This may also guide policy-makers in designing FinTech credit policies in Sri Lanka.

Importantly, this study provides one of the first empirical examinations of BNPL's financial outcomes among Sri Lankan users, adding to Sri Lankan FinTech literature, and offering a unique contribution, by challenging global narratives and global outcomes.

Future research should explore demographic variations, psychological drivers shaped by unstable economies and specially, the long-term effects of expanding credit limits on local BNPL Apps. Qualitative and longitudinal studies may uncover deeper behavioural nuances not present in quantitative studies, revealing a broader understanding of BNPL's evolving impact.

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Annexure1

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics: Risk–Return Comparison (2020-2024)

Asset Class	Year	Return (%)	Risk (%)	Sharpe Ratio
Ethereum	2020	82	53.1	1.42
	2021	–79.06	38.37	–2.22
	2022	215.2	72.87	2.87
	2023	–78.97	58.63	–1.45
	2024	–37.50	68.66	–0.61
Bitcoin	2020	39.73	61.1	0.57
	2021	–60.50	66.65	–0.98
	2022	186.2	65.17	2.8
	2023	–51.81	32.98	–1.73
	2024	–44.75	52.71	–0.95
CSE (ASPI)	2020	10.52	22.5	–0.07
	2021	80.48	30	2.28
	2022	–30.46	55	–0.77
	2023	25.31	25	0.53
	2024	49.66	28	1.34
Treasury Bills (3 months)	2020	5.85	0.36	16.12

	2021	6.17	0.39	15.81
	2022	826.1	27.46	30.09
	2023	639.9	16.17	39.57
	2024	153.4	2.73	56.22

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