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EDITORIAL NOTE

We are pleased to inform you that the first issue for Volume 6 of the Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (SLJSSH) has now been published. We are a bi-annual journal that encourages research in the field of social sciences and humanities. We invite researchers to contribute their research articles based on theoretical, empirical, policy-oriented, and practitioner studies that contribute to global academic discourse. Our aim is to foster an environment where diverse research thrives, and experts in the social science domain can collaborate with each other. For every research article that we receive from researchers, we have a strict policy to ensure that only quality research is published by following a double-blind peer-review policy. Our journal is included in the Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) database. Over time, we have seen the number of readers, submissions, and citations for our journal increasing. This reflects our commitment to quality research.

The six papers included in this issue provide valuable insights into various social, educational, and economic issues that have a direct bearing on the development process in Sri Lanka. The paper on the imagination of future living geo-spaces among undergraduates provides valuable insights into the perception of mobility, employment, and regional disparities, which can be useful in planning for the development of the youth and the regions in Sri Lanka. Similarly, the paper on rational competency among Ayurveda practitioners provides valuable insights into the effective management of business uncertainty, emphasizing the need to promote the rational competency of practitioners in the development process in Sri Lanka. The proposed framework for the coordination of responsibilities in student evaluation can strengthen the governance process in the higher education system in Sri Lanka, while the paper on the impact of economic crises on secondary education in Sri Lanka provides valuable insights into the impact of macro-economic crises on education and the need to promote stability in the development process in Sri Lanka. The research paper on the support courses and institutional arrangements in the state universities in Sri Lanka highlights the significance of the English language in improving equity, academic success, and employment potential in Sri Lanka, while the paper on the impact of interpersonal norms on the performance of retail businesses provides valuable insights into the significance of interpersonal norms in improving the performance of businesses in Sri Lanka.

As the Editor-in-Chief of SLJSSH, I would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to the Coordinating Editor, Editors, Reviewers, Text Editor, and Editorial Assistant for their dedication and expertise in making this journal a success. Most importantly, the support we get from the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka has been instrumental in the success of the journal. We would like to extend our appreciation and gratitude to our authors for their valuable contributions to the journal, and look forward to your continued support in our pursuit of achieving greater heights in the success of the journal. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to SLJSSH, and we wish you all the best in your continued contributions.

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Abstract

In behavioural geography, a distinction exists between the physical geographic space in which people live and the fantasy geographic space in which they mentally aspire to live. The main objective of this study was to analyse the fantasies of Sri Lankan undergraduates in the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines regarding their 'future living geo-spaces,' using the University of Ruhuna as the research context. A qualitatively dominant mixed research methodology and an inductive research approach were employed. To collect quantitative primary data, a short questionnaire was given to students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, selected through a simple random sampling method. Qualitative primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with students and individuals who had already migrated to foreign countries, selected using a purposive sampling method. A qualitative explanatory analysis method was used for data interpretation and analysis. The key finding of this study is that the future fantasy living spaces of students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences are predominantly oriented toward capitalist countries. Among those countries, the most prominent are those dominated by Anglo-Saxons and where English is spoken as the primary language. This situation can be interpreted through the theoretical lenses of core-peripheral dependency and the concepts of autonomy and hegemony. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that this fantasy pattern is deeply aligned with the theoretical frameworks of behavioural geography. These insights are important for informing public policy formulation and decision-making processes in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Behavioural Geography, Fantasy Living Geo-Space, Geo-Space, Undergraduates in Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna

INTRODUCTION

The concept of space has long been central to geographical thought, serving as a foundation for understanding how human beings interact with their environments (Holloway & Hubbard, 2014). In the realm of geographical philosophy, two distinct yet interwoven notions of living space emerge; the real geographical living space and the fantasy living space. The former pertains to the material, physical spaces that humans inhabit cities, rural landscapes, and homes, shaped by geographical, political, and socio-economic factors (Harvey, 1973; Sudradjat, 2012). The latter refers to imagined, idealised, or virtual spaces that individuals and societies conceive as aspirational, utopian, or symbolic realms, influenced by cultural narratives, media, and personal desires (Lefebvre, 1991). These two dimensions of space highlight the interplay between objective spatial realities and subjective human experiences, a theme deeply embedded in philosophical and humanistic geography.

The concept of extra-geographical living space is rooted in the tangible, measurable world, where choices and communities construct their habitats and shape landscapes through economic activity, political structures, and cultural transmission (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991). This space is bound by physical constraints such as topography, climate, and infrastructure, making it a place of material existence and presence (Lewis, 2023; Soja, 1980; Walmsley & Lewis, 2014). In a nutshell, the Industrial Revolution redefined living spaces by transforming rural settlements into urban metropolises, changing both human experiences of space and the fabric of built environments (Smith, 1984). Thus, the real geographical living space is a constantly evolving creation shaped by natural and man-made factors.

The notion of imaginary living spaces, or "fantasised living spaces," on the other hand, maintains the limitations of ma-

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terial reality while acting as a symbolic or aspirational depiction of the ideal human life (Street & Coleman, 2012; Sudradjat, 2012). This notion has strong philosophical roots, especially in the writings of philosophers like (Bachelard, 1964), who studied how our imagination affects how we perceive space. Literature, mythology, and modern digital environments all contain examples of imaginary living spaces that provide people with respite from the constricting circumstances of their actual living quarters. Thomas More first proposed the idea of utopia in 1516. People often imagine a different living environment that differs from their actual living environment and social circumstances (Paniotova, 2016). This is explained by the human brain's propensity to enter a new living space and transcend the line separating the para-imaginary (fantasy) world from the real world (Graham, 1998; Van de Mosselaer & Gualeni, 2022).

People are currently attracted to the urban imaginary living space, which is built on the capitalist dream world, modern cultural symbols, and digital technology, which is creating fantasies of better living in space. Cities function both as tangible habitats and as imagined landscapes, reflecting aspirations for success and beauty (Jacobs, 1961; Lefebvre, 1991) highlights that the 'space of human desire' is socially constructed, with human behaviour shaped by capitalist forces that commodify both real and imagined spaces (Collins, 2020; Davis, 1990; Harvey, 2006). The digital age has introduced metaverses and virtual environments, where users engage with imaginary geographies (Castells, 1996). This era has expanded human aspirations for space, linking them to various geographical regions and fostering a greater willingness to migrate (McAuliffe, 2021).

The tension between physical and imagined living spaces raises fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of human existence and spatial experience. Are imagined spaces mere illusions, or do they have tangible effects on real-world behaviour and social structures? On what basis are these fantasised geographical spaces constructed in the human mind? What are the geopolitical, economic, psychological, and sociological foundations behind the human desire for imaginary living spaces? These questions primarily fall within the domain of behavioural human geography (Czaika et al., 2021).

Sri Lanka, an island situated in the tropical region, politically and economically belongs to the periphery of the periphery according to the core-periphery dependency theory (Morales Ruvalcaba, 2023). Presently, the country grapples with various economic and political challenges (DeVotta, 2022). Human fantasy can be defined as 'a pleasant situation that individuals enjoy contemplating but is improbable to occur,' or 'the activity of envisioning such scenarios,' while 'human fantasy in storytelling merges real-world settings with imaginative elements, focusing on human emotions, relationships, and personal growth' (Wahlen et al., 2011). Discrepancies often exist between the 'real geographical living space' of people inhabiting and their 'fantasy living space.' This situation is particularly unique in a periphery-of-peripheral country, facing political and economic crises. A comprehensive analytical study on the fantasies of Sri Lankan undergraduates in humanities and social sciences disciplines concerning their 'Future Living Geo-spaces' has not yet been conducted. This study aims to fulfil this knowledge gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Behavioural Geography: Human Desire for Living Space and Migration

Theories of behavioural geography provide the philosophical foundation for understanding how human emotions and social constructs influence migration decisions. Unlike classical economic migration theories, which emphasise rational decision-making based on push and pull factors, behavioural geography focuses on individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations of space (Lewis, 2023). It strongly challenges the deterministic view that human migration is driven solely by economic necessity. Instead, it argues that migration decisions are shaped by individuals' perceptions of potential destinations, personal aspirations, and social networks. Cognitive mapping, mental and emotional images of fantasised geographical spaces, and place attachment play a crucial role in shaping migration patterns (Castells, 1996; Lewis, 2023). Thus, as analysed by behavioural geographers, the desire to change one's living space is determined not only by economic or political conditions but also by psychological, cultural, and social factors.

'Place Perception Theory' and Human Living Space

Place Perception Theory is a key concept in behavioural geography that explores how people subjectively perceive, interpret, and emotionally engage with living geo-spaces (Tuan, 1977/2001). Unlike traditional geographical theories that assume a subjective understanding of space, Place Perception Theory mainly emphasises that individuals experience and evaluate places based on personal, cultural, and social influences. Tuan (1977/2001) introduced the concept of *topophilia*, associated with Place Perception Theory, which describes the emotional attachments of people to their living places and space (Tuan, 1977/2001). Human perceptions of places are very subjective and individualised, and human attachment to places is influenced by memories, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. In a similar vein, (Relph, 1976/2020) maintained that identity and entitlement are greatly influenced by one's sense of place. This theory holds that an individual's perception of their living space evolves and depends on their unique situation (Relph, 1976/2020).

Place perception theory is important in the field of migration studies because it explains how migrants form expectations about the countries they intend to migrate to. Media representations, social networks, and past experiences all influence how people perceive foreign external locations; these factors can sometimes lead to irrational expectations, and migrants must cope with culture shock when they move (Cresswell, 2004). All things considered, this theory explains how people's attachment to their home is a subjective attachment that goes beyond economic and political ties and how it changes and transforms depending on a number of factors. This theory has significant implications for the study of human mobility and interactions with geographic spaces.

Place Attachment and Place Identity

Place attachment, place identity, and key concepts in environmental psychology explain how people form mental and emotional connections with particular locations (Peng et al., 2020). Place attachment is the deep emotional connection that people develop with specific places as a result of memories, social interactions, and individual experiences

(Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This "uniquely specific familiar place" is the most suitable and comfortable place for the individuals in question to live (Peng et al., 2020).

The concept of place identity, first proposed by Proshansky et al. (1983), characterises the ways in which an individual's thoughts and perceptions are impacted. Cultural and social factors shape place identities, which are dynamic. Social, historical, and cultural elements influence place identity. Just as geospatial locations change according to human thoughts, human thoughts are also shaped by place identity, and people maintain mental and emotional attachments with those places. Accordingly, migration is not just a movement from one place to another. It is a displacement from a specific place where one's thinking is formed and bound, to a geographical space where there is no such binding (Peng et al., 2020). So why do people create fantasies to migrate? There are several theories that explain why people choose to move to a new geographical area, leaving behind a familiar living place to which they are deeply emotionally attached. Among those theories, 'Mental Maps and Perception Theory', 'Behavioural Decision-Making Theory', 'Prospect-Refuge Theory', 'Life-Course Migration Theory' and 'Cumulative Causation & Social Influence' are mainly important to explain the above situation.

'Beyond the Comfort Geographical Zone': Theories of Human Behaviour and Attraction to New Spaces

Mental Maps and Perception Theory

Mental maps and cognitive theory analyse how individuals mentally process and perceive their living environment or their imagined living environment. This theory explains how people create mental maps of their surroundings, which are subjective and dynamic in nature, influencing decision-making and spatial understanding related to navigation (Gould & White, 2005; Lynch, 1964). Related to this theory, cognitive mapping, a concept introduced by (Lynch, 1964), plays a crucial role in place perception. According to Lynch, individuals construct mental maps of their environment based on landmarks, routes, and regions that shape their spatial behaviour and navigation. These mental maps are highly subjective and can vary significantly between individuals due to personal experiences, social contexts, and media influence (Lynch, 1964).

Behavioural Decision-Making Theory

Behavioural decision-making theory mainly focuses on analysing how psychological factors influence the migration decisions of human beings (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). This theory basically critiques the traditional economic theories that analyse people's migration based only on economic factors (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Kahneman, 2011). A fundamental feature of this behavioural decision-making theory is that, in addition to economic factors, psychological factors also have a major impact on changing the familiar living space of the people (Kahneman, 2011). According to behavioural decision-making theory, individuals make migration decisions based on psychological factors, including social influences that cause them to change their emotions and mental states. Rather than the question of 'how comfortable the familiar geographical space' in which people live is, the analysis here examines 'how much social influences' add to the psychological motivation for migration. In particular, recent studies based on this theory explain how individual migra-

tions occur based on psychological stimuli rather than as rational social phenomena (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). Also, the contexts that are constructed for migration needs and that appear to be 'reasonable and rational needs' are psychological factors that are constructed by social stimuli. This psychological behavioural study is important in studying why people change the familiar geographical space that represents them (Sonkar & Ram, 2024).

The Prospect-Refuge Theory

The future-refuge theory, developed by (Appleton, 1975), explains that humans, driven by evolutionary survival instincts, are naturally attracted to the environment. According to this theory, people are attracted to hypothetically safe environments that satisfy a basic human desire for both security and opportunity. In the context of human migration, individuals are attracted to new places where they can access economic, educational, or social opportunities, which also ensure safety and survival. Migrants evaluate potential destinations not only for practical benefits but also for psychological comfort and a sense of control over their surroundings (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). This theory helps explain why people leave familiar places in search of safer and more comfortable environments.

The Life-Course Migration Theory

Elder Jr (1998) developed the life-course migration theory and basically explains that there is a relationship between the age of people and migration. Migration patterns change according to the age of the people. Especially during a young age, factors such as education, marriage, and employment are the main factors that drive migration. Most probably, young people believe that changing their living space helps them to make a new and better life. On the other hand, in old age, people migrate with the primary goal of living a better retirement life. Often, in old age, people migrate back to the familiar environment where they spent their childhood. Recent research by (Lulle, 2024) examined the factors that drive migration among middle-aged migrant women. It was clear that the monotonous life and economic distances, as well as the problems caused by gender, had led to changes in their living space. Bernard et al. (2014) found that age is a significant factor in studying migration patterns across countries. This has become an important theory in migration analysis, as it suggests that the nature of the decision to leave one's familiar environment varies with the age of the individuals concerned.

Cumulative Causation and Social Influence Theory

The Cumulative Inventions and Social Initiation theory was developed by (Myrdal, 1957). The theory explains that people who migrate make the decision not to migrate of their own volition. This is due to social influence. People are driven to migrate based on factors such as the conversations that occur among people in society, parental influence, the migration of friends, social opinion, and the migration trends of the time. According to this theory, when the social groups they represented have migrated collectively as a group, people resort to migration even without a specific reason and also people are driven to migrate, especially based on social conversations, parental influence, friends migrating, social opinion, and migration trends of the particular time (Korinek et al., 2025). This theory helps explain why people change familiar living geo-spaces to which they are emotionally attached.

Ideological Struggles: Autonomy, Hegemony, and Their Impact on Human Living Space and Migration

'Autonomy' is the ability of individuals or groups to make their own decisions and live according to their own values without external coercion or undue influence (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022). Those who possess this dominant power also hold cultural and political dominance. 'Hegemony' refers to the dominance of one group or ideology over others, often exercised through cultural influence and ideas rather than direct force, shaping the way people think and behave (Mouffe, 2014). People living in geospatial areas without dominant power are psychologically drawn to the geographical spaces inhabited by those with dominant power (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022; Mouffe, 2014).

Conversely, people who possess autonomic power tend to perceive their own geographical space as a socio-culturally, politically, and economically ideal and even fantasised place to live (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022). What is particularly interesting is that when these individuals view their own geo-space as an 'ideal living space,' this perception, when seen from the perspective of dominant power, is also fantasised by those who are subject to that dominance (Scheel, 2019). As a result, people living under hegemonic influence begin to believe that their own geo-space is unsuitable for a better life, and that the geo-space inhabited by those with autocratic power is ideal. Consequently, they become emotionally motivated to migrate to these fantasised spaces, even though they are unfamiliar with them (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022; Mouffe, 2014). This is a hegemonic situation. Particularly in the post-colonial era, people have been drawn to Western capitalist countries because of this dynamic between autonomy and hegemony. This hegemonic analysis can also serve as a critical framework in the study of human migration.

Core-Peripheral Dependency and Geospatial Fantasies

The Core-Peripheral Dependency theory builds on global inequalities to explain migration patterns. Rich, capitalist nations constitute the "core," while poorer nations form the "periphery" (Friedmann & Wayne, 1977; Lisimba, 2020). The core controls not only economic opportunities but also the political and cultural development of the periphery. Wallerstein (2004) emphasises that while the core thrives, the periphery stagnates, reinforcing global inequalities.

People in peripheral countries often view the core as a space of opportunity. This worldview fosters migration fantasies, especially among the educated, leading to "brain drain." Sheller (2018) argues that capitalist global flows define which spaces are viewed as desirable, prompting migration from high-barrier to high-opportunity regions. This cyclical migration reinforces dependency, draining human capital from the periphery and deepening development gaps.

Migration Fantasies Among the Sri Lankan Youth

Sri Lanka's position within the global periphery is reflected in its post-COVID economic crisis and the long-term effects of civil conflict (Brun, 2019; George et al., 2022; Sriskandarajah, 2002). Youth aged 18–29 are increasingly seeking opportunities abroad (Samarasinghe, 2022; Gunawardena & Yahampath, 2024). Australia is a major destination, with many Sri Lankans undertaking irregular migration (Rukshan & Manage, 2024). Migration desire varies by region and is shaped by education, gender, ethnicity, and social back-

ground (De Haas, 2020). Human trafficking linked to migration disrupts family structures and undermines social cohesion (Boyagoda & Senadhi, 2020).

Many migrants face a gap between the "fantasised better life" and the harsh realities abroad. Brain drain, in particular, drains Sri Lanka's educated population and weakens national development capacity. Understanding these fantasies is vital for public policy, especially in addressing root causes such as inequality, educational gaps, and political instability.

Escaping Potential: Brain Drain and Its Implications for Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's free education system represents a major state investment. When educated individuals migrate, this becomes a developmental loss (Kaluarachchi & Jayathilaka, 2024). Increasingly, young people treat education as a pathway to migration. Over 300,000 individuals left during the 2022 crisis alone (Nushara Ameer et al., 2024). This is not purely economic. Psychological and cultural drivers play a crucial role.

Migration of skilled professionals triggers chain reactions, causing others to follow (Kaluarachchi & Jayathilaka, 2024). Labour shortages now affect essential sectors like healthcare and education. The drain of skilled workers also deters foreign investment. Comprehensive policy reforms are necessary both to retain talent and to integrate the diaspora into national development. Without such measures, Sri Lanka's long-term socioeconomic stability remains at risk.

Knowledge Gap of Research

Although behavioural geography emphasises emotional and subjective ties to space (Tuan, 1977/2001), migration from familiar environments continues due to various psychological, economic, and ideological reasons (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022; Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Kahneman, 2011). In Sri Lanka, brain drain is a pressing issue (Kaluarachchi & Jayathilaka, 2024) yet little research explores how undergraduate students in the humanities and social sciences imagine their "future living geo-spaces."

This study addresses that gap by focusing on undergraduates at the University of Ruhuna's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. It explores the following research objectives:

- To identify and describe the nature of the fantasised future living geo-spaces of Sri Lankan undergraduates in the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines.
- To analyse the fantasies of Sri Lankan undergraduates about their future living geo-spaces through relevant theoretical frameworks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative dominant mixed methodology due to its focus on understanding students' fantasies about their future living spaces in relation to socio-cultural, economic, and political phenomena. This understanding is developed through comparisons of social experiences, norms, and philosophies, rather than through the analysis of numerical data. The approach emphasises 'words' over 'numbers,' aiming to address the 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' of social phenomena (Bryman, 2016). Qualitative research is considered more effective in comprehending, describing,

and interpreting social theories and structures, which aligns with the core components of this study (Mohajan, 2018).

The study is based on an inductive research approach combined with qualitative methodology. It begins by gathering data from both secondary and primary sources, and then links these findings to relevant theories, discourses, and concepts.

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection and Sampling Method:

Three main methods were used in this study to collect primary data:

Short Questionnaire Survey – One hundred students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Ruhuna were selected using a random sampling method and given a short questionnaire. They were asked about their current living geo-space and its characteristics, as well as basic information regarding their fantasised future living geo-space and its nature.

In-depth Interviews Type 01 [IDIT-i]– From the group of students who participated in the questionnaire survey, twenty-one (21) were selected using a purposive sampling method for in-depth qualitative discussions. These discussions focused on their ideas about future living geo-spaces.

In-depth Interviews Type 02 [IDIT-ii] – Nine (09) individuals who completed their first degree in the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines at Sri Lankan state universities and are currently living abroad were selected through purposive sampling. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted via WhatsApp. These discussions initially focused on the gap between their fantasies of changing their living space and the reality they experienced.

Secondary Data: Relevant Research Papers and Books

According to the philosophical perspectives of human geography, the theoretical aspects that influence human life on Earth and its transformation are crucial in this study. In particular, information related to theories, discourses, and ideologies such as: “Place Perception Theory and Human Living Space, Place Attachment and Place Identity, Mental Maps and Perception Theory, Behavioral Decision-Making Theory, The Prospect-Refuge Theory, The Life-Course Migration Theory, Cumulative Causation & Social Influence Theory, Ideological Struggles: Autonomy, Hegemony, and Their Impact on Human Living Space and Migration, Core-Peripheral, Dependency and the Creation of Human Fantasies in Geospatial Migration” which influence human behavior and migration patterns, were gathered from relevant academic publications, books, and research journals.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative explanatory analysis is a research data analysis method used to explore and understand complex social phenomena by examining underlying causes, meanings, and patterns. This method deeply analyses the causes and patterns of human behaviour, both empirically and theoretically (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is especially suited for studies where contextual understanding is essential and variables cannot be easily quantified. Researchers interpret data

inductively, identifying themes and relationships to construct explanations based on participants’ perspectives (Patton, 2014). It is widely used in the social sciences for theory development and for explaining the processes behind observable outcomes.

This study primarily focuses on qualitative data, and qualitative explanatory analysis was used as the main method for data analysis. Descriptive, simple statistical techniques were applied to analyse the quantitative data, which served as a supporting method to complement the qualitative findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study have been analysed based on the three research questions used for this study.

The Nature of Fantasised Future Living Geo-Spaces

According to the questionnaire survey conducted among a randomly selected group of one hundred students studying at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, regarding the type of living space they would prefer after completing their degree, 86% of students have fantasised about changing their living geo-space and wish to migrate outside the country (a summary of the data is shown in Table 01). Although 14 students expressed a desire to remain in Sri Lanka, only one of them wishes to stay in the same geographical space in the future (Table 02). The remaining 13 students have fantasised about migrating from rural areas to semi-urban or urban geo-spaces within the country.

Table 01: Fantasies of Sri Lankan Undergraduates in Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplines about ‘Future Living Geo-spaces’: A Study Based at the University of Ruhuna.

	<i>The Nature of Fantasised Future Living Geo-Spaces: Country name</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
01	Do not like to migrate from Sri Lanka	14
02	Canada	13
03	UK	11
04	Australia	11
05	USA	10
06	New Zealand	06
07	Japan	05
08	Itali	05
09	Finland	04
10	German	04
11	South Korea	03
12	Norway	03
13	Switzerland	03
14	Sweden	02
15	Netherland	02
16	Singapore	01
17	French	01
18	Ireland	01
19	Denmark	01
	Total	100

Source: Short Questionnaire Survey of the Study, 2025.

The survey results reveal that 99 out of 100 respondents desire to change their current living space. This strongly reflects the influence of core-peripheral dependency theory in shaping these geo-spatial preferences (Friedmann & Wayne, 1977; Lisimba, 2020). Even among the graduates who do not

wish to leave the country, there is a clear preference for re-locating to the 'core' areas within Sri Lanka, highlighting the internal core-peripheral dynamics of the nation. Those who fantasise about changing their living geo-space beyond national borders have selected 18 countries out of the 195 in the world. Among these, Canada, the United Kingdom, the

United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand are the most preferred destinations. Notably, like these major countries, all the others selected are also developed capitalist states. This raises a significant question: How can this situation be analysed?

Table 02: Fantasised Future Living Geo-Space of the Students who do not want to Migrate from the Country.

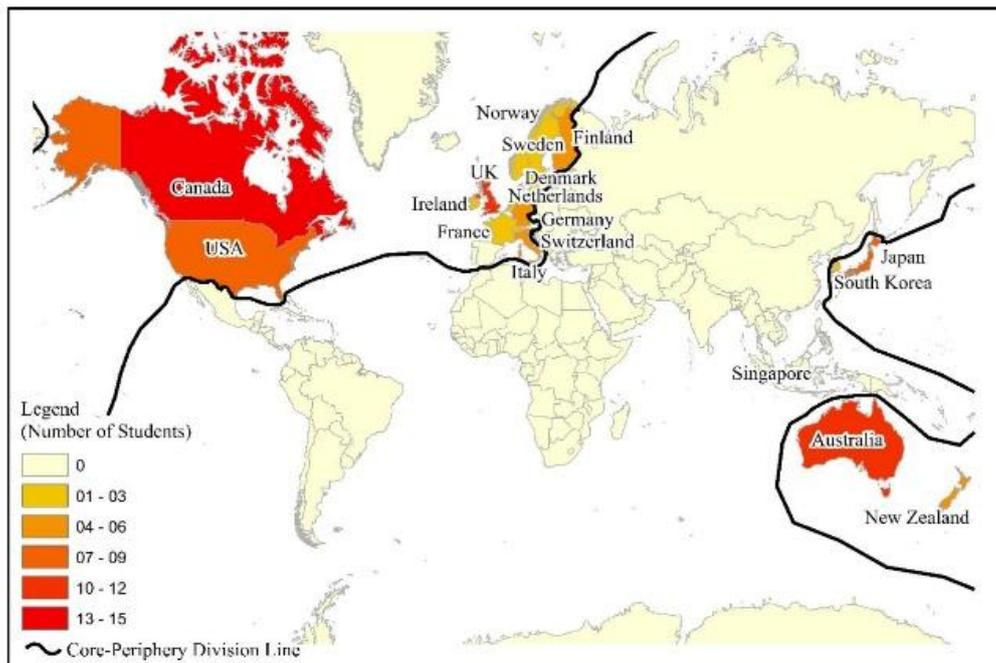
	Currently living geo-space of the students who do not like to migrate outside of Sri Lanka	Fantasised future living geo-space of Sri Lanka
01	Rural	Same place
02	Rural	Urban
03	Rural	Urban
04	Semi-urban	Urban
05	Rural	Semi- urban
06	Semi-urban	Urban
07	Semi-urban	Urban
08	Rural	Urban
09	Rural	Urban
10	Semi-urban	Urban
11	Rural	Semi-urban
12	Rural	Urban
12	Rural	Urban
14	Semi-urban	Urban

Source: Short Questionnaire Survey of the Study, 2025.

The free education system in Sri Lanka serves as the primary means of social mobility for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Batatota, 2023). It has enabled the rural poor to ascend into the upper or lower middle classes. Although students particularly those in rural areas face limited access to education in disciplines such as science and mathematics, they do have relatively greater access to faculties of humanities and social sciences. Students entering

these faculties primarily view higher education as a pathway to transcend their socio-economic status, rather than as a means to obtain high-quality education. Their aspirations are rooted in transitioning to a capitalist, consumer-oriented lifestyle. Consequently, their visions of ideal living spaces are linked to geographical locations where such a lifestyle is attainable (Batatota, 2023). Achieving this necessitates escaping the rural, peripheral geographical spaces with which they are familiar.

Figure 01: Fantasies of Countries of the Sri Lankan Undergraduates in Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplines about 'Future Living Geo-spaces'.



[The core countries lie to the north and east of the core-periphery dividing line, while the peripheral countries lie to the south and west.]

Source: Prepared Based on the Short Questionnaire Survey, 2025.

"My village is in Karapitiya, Godakanda (a semi-urban area). Many people from our area have migrated abroad. I too have dreamed of going abroad since childhood. After completing my degree, my main aspiration is to go to England. Alternatively, I would consider going to Canada, New Zealand, or any other English-speaking country. I believe those are the best countries" (IDIT-i-01: Male student, 24 years old, from a semi-urban area, 2025.01.20)

The countries primarily selected by students in the humanities and social sciences are specific and consistent. According to the theory of Core -Peripheral Dependency, all five of these countries are capitalist nations dominated by Anglo-Saxon autonomy (Friedmann & Wayne, 1977; Lisimba, 2020). From the perspective of world-systems theory and the core-periphery model, the United States and the United Kingdom can be identified as "core-of-the-core" countries. When evaluated through both political power and development indicators, these countries are regarded as global leaders possessing substantial political autonomy (Friedmann & Wayne, 1977).

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, while not at the core's centre, are wealthy and supportive peripheral states that are closely aligned with the core nations mentioned above. In contrast, Sri Lanka is situated at the periphery of the periphery. It can also be argued that, due to its colonial history under British rule, Sri Lanka has, perhaps unconsciously, internalised the authority of capitalist economic systems and Anglo-Saxon hegemony through both colonial and postcolonial influences (Wallerstein, 2004). Accordingly, it can be interpreted that Sri Lankan students pursuing studies in the fields of humanities and social sciences who aim to transcend class boundaries through education tend to mentally detach from their lived geographical realities. Instead, they are increasingly drawn toward the aspiration of migrating to countries characterised by Anglo-Saxon dominance (Sheller, 2018).

"I was born in a rural area in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. Our family's main source of income was paddy farming. But due to various problems, we are poor like all the farmers in our province. After completing my degree, they would go back to the village and show me something to do. My dream is to become a teacher in a government school. I have no intention of leaving Sri Lanka. But to start the life I want, I will have to change my residence to a city or an area close to a city. I especially like a semi-urban life" (IDIT-i-08: Female student, 24 years old, from Dry zone, Rural area, 2025.01.20).

In addition to the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Scandinavian nations are among the most attractive destinations for students. These countries are renowned for their emphasis on freedom, democracy, high standards of living, and robust welfare systems.

"After completing my degree, I would like to go abroad. Based on what I have heard, countries such as Norway offer a high quality of life and uphold gender equality and individual freedoms, making them appealing places to live" (IDIT-i-03: Female student, 24 years old, from wet zone, Rural area, 2025.01.20).

Fourteen out of the one hundred individuals in the sample indicated that they had no intention of leaving Sri Lanka. This decision stems from the fact that, although they concede the need to change their familiar geographical environment, they prefer to remain within the country due to the strength of their existing cultural and social networks.

"Many of my friends want to migrate to a developed country to secure a good job. However, my parents are elderly, and I am the only one who can take care of them. That is why I want to stay in Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, I do not wish to return to my village after graduation. I would prefer to leave the rural area and seek employment in an urban setting" (IDIT-i-06: Female student, 25 years old, from the Dry Zone, rural area; interview conducted on 2025.01.19).

Geo-spatial Imaginaries: Understanding Aspirational Migration Through Theoretical Lenses.

This section aims to analyse, through the lens of human geographic theories, the factors that influence Sri Lankan students pursuing degrees in Humanities and Social Sciences to identify the geospatial areas in which they aspire to live in the future. Classical geographers such as Tuan and Relph, who have explored the relationship between geographic space and human behaviour, argue that human interactions with space can be analysed through anthropological emotions (Tuan, 1977/2001; Relph, 1976). The 'Place Perception Theory' is particularly useful in this context (Castells, 1996; Lewis, 2023). This theory posits that individuals' spatial behaviours are shaped more by subjective factors such as personal experiences, social motivations, and cultural values than by purely rational considerations. Tuan (1977/2001) elaborates on this through the concept of *Topophilia*, which refers to the emotional connections people form with places (Tuan, 1977). This theoretical framework can be applied to analyse the imaginative geospatial projections of students in Sri Lanka's faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences regarding their future living spaces, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

"After completing my degree, I hope to go to England for further studies. If I can't go to England, I will try to go to another country where English is spoken as the mother tongue. After that, I hope to stay there. I believe that England is a better place to live with a better standard of living. My family and relatives say so" (IDIT-i-12: Female student, 25 years old, from the wet zone, urban; interview conducted on 2025.02.01).

In this instance, the belief that "England is a better place to live" represents a subjective fantasy informed by the socio-cultural values of the student and the community in which she currently resides. England is imagined as a space of autonomy and hegemonic superiority, reflecting dependency on dominant global narratives (Fischer & Jørgensen, 2022; Mouffe, 2014). However, this perception does not take into account recent trends such as the internal migration of native Anglo-Saxon populations from various parts of the United Kingdom to other regions, often in search of more affordable or sustainable living conditions (Wang et al., 2022).

Theories of *Place Attachment* and *Place Identity* examine how environmental psychological factors influence individuals' emotional and cognitive connections to specific places (Peng et al., 2020). According to these theories, individuals often maintain a deep, spiritual connection to familiar environments. This connection typically surpasses any attachment to unfamiliar areas. People are often reluctant to leave these mentally and emotionally significant places, even when confronted with economic disadvantages. Changing one's relationship with a familiar geographical space is therefore not a straightforward process (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

"I am from a rural agricultural area in the Monaragala District. Our village is a very beautiful place. I went to the village school. All my relatives live in that area. My greatest joy is visiting my village during every university vacation. However, after completing my degree, I am planning to go to Japan. I know I won't get a job in Sri Lanka immediately after graduation. Even if I do, the salary will be very low. Many of our friends have gone to Japan for postgraduate studies and then stayed on to work and earn money. According to them, Japan is a good place to go for a while, earn money, and come back. No matter how beautiful my village is, I don't plan to stay there in the future, because it won't give me the life I want" (IDIT-i-12: Female student, 24 years old, from the dry zone, rural; interview conducted on 2025.01.27).

As the theories of *Place Attachment* and *Place Identity* suggest, in order for individuals to detach from environments to which they are spiritually and emotionally bound, sufficiently powerful factors must emerge to break that connection (Peng et al., 2020). In the case of the student above, her deep emotional attachment to her village is evident. Nevertheless, multiple forces, including economic pressures, capitalist aspirations, peer influence, and the anticipation of a higher standard of living, have collectively constructed fantasy images that weaken this attachment. These factors have gradually disrupted her connection to her home region and redirected her aspirations toward the global capitalist core.

Mental Maps and Perception Theory explains that human spatial understanding is fundamentally a psychological and cognitive process. Individuals perceive physical and human geographical features through the mental maps they construct in their minds (Gould & White, 2005; Lynch, 1964). According to this theory, space and time are not merely objective realities but are instead analysed as imaginary constructs formed in the human mind based on physical and human geographical experiences (Lynch, 1964). When one's mental map of their current living space is not comforting or satisfying, people tend to create imagined mental representations of alternative spaces, fantasising about migrating to those places (Lynch, 1964). The dreams of undergraduates in the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties about changing their future living environments can be analysed through this theoretical framework.

"With the economic crisis that emerged during the COVID period, I have a dark image of Sri Lanka in my mind. I want to leave. I've seen milk powder advertisements from New Zealand, and I imagine a beautiful, isolated grassland and a free life there. I can't let go of the dark memories of Sri Lanka. I would love to live in cold New Zealand. My favourite country

is New Zealand" (IDIT-i-02: Female student, 23 years old, from the rural wet zone; interview conducted on 2025.01.20)

The mental map this student constructs of New Zealand, shaped by the challenges in her current environment, is a fantasy rather than a reflection of reality. The actual experiences of Sri Lankans involved in dairy farming in New Zealand are quite different (IDIT-ii-06).

"Living in New Zealand is an extremely difficult thing. Especially, the cost of living is much higher than in Sri Lanka. Job opportunities here are very limited. People who come from Sri Lanka for work often end up helpless. Even locals are now moving to Australia in search of jobs. This country is indeed beautiful, but finding a good job is extremely hard. Jobs related to dairy farming are particularly tough. Right now, it's the calving season, and I am busy all day, hardly any rest at all. I'm looking after 280 cows by myself. If you're not truly interested in this kind of work, it becomes unbearable. Living in isolation here is also very hard to cope with" (IDIT-ii-06: Male dairy farmer, 44 years old, Ortago, New Zealand, who has 15 years of experience in the field, interview conducted on 2025.02.10).

Behavioural geographers argue that economic factors are not the primary determinants of people's choices regarding future living spaces (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). Instead, external factors are often more influential than purely psychological ones. As explained by Behavioural Decision-Making Theory, individuals' imaginations about their desired spaces are shaped by para-imaginary psychological factors, rather than by objective physical or human geographical realities (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). Therefore, in analysing fantasies related to migration and personal sacrifice, it is more meaningful to focus on individual psychological behaviour than on the economic or geographic realities influencing those decisions (Sonkar & Ram, 2024).

Fantasying to Migrant: Education, Age, Security, and Social Influence in Theoretical Perspective

The prospect-refuge theory developed by Appleton, 1975 can be presented as a theory that explains why people are drawn to abandon their familiar geographical spaces. This theory suggests that human beings, guided by an instinct for evolutionary survival, are naturally attracted to environments they perceive as safe (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). This study also highlights how the concepts of freedom and security have contributed to the migration fantasies constructed by university students pursuing degrees in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

"I feel that Sri Lanka is not a safe country to live in. Especially when it comes to women, there are many issues in Sri Lanka. We only begin to understand that there is such a problem when we study gender and social issues in university course modules. I want to immigrate to a safe country like the United Kingdom for higher education and permanent residency. Freedom and security are the most important things" (IDIT-i-15 Female student, 25 years old, from the rural wet zone; interview conducted on 2025.02.21).

Young people from peripheral countries often fantasise about new places where they believe they can access economic, educational, or social opportunities, assuming that such access will ensure their safety and survival (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). However, they rarely engage in a critical analysis of how realistic these fantasies actually are. The following presents the experience of a woman who migrated to the United Kingdom for higher education.

“Freedom and security are two extremely important concepts in determining where people choose to live. I came to the United Kingdom for higher education while working as a university lecturer in Sri Lanka. In fact, I had a genuine need to stay in this country. When considering gender dynamics or any other context, it is true that Sri Lanka faces many issues related to freedom and security. In contrast, those issues are minimal in this country. However, instead, I now face a range of other challenges, such as economic difficulties, the psychological stress caused by isolation, and problems arising from being part of an ethnic minority. At present, I feel more insecure here than I did in Sri Lanka” (IDIT-ii-01: female PhD Student, 46 years old, who has 03 years of living experience in the UK, interview conducted on 2025.02.08).

Students studying in the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties in Sri Lanka fall within the age range of 22 to 26 years. Furthermore, education has provided them with an opportunity to escape the isolation commonly found in rural environments. This study reveals that such circumstances have contributed to shaping their mindset and motivated them to consider migration to developed foreign countries.

“I’m from a rural area in the Kurunegala District. None of my family, my mother, father, or relatives has ever gone abroad. In our village, the poorest women go to the Middle East as domestic workers. People consider it a difficult and unpleasant job. But after coming to university, I realised that if there’s a chance to go to a country like Australia at a young age, it would be a good opportunity. Once I complete my degree, I will try to go to a better country” (IDIT-i-21 Female student, 25 years old, from the rural dry zone; interview conducted on 2025.02.25).

This situation can be analysed through the Life-Course Migration Theory developed by Elder Jr (1998). This theory explains that there is a relationship between a person’s age and migration. Migration patterns vary according to age. Particularly during youth, factors such as education, marriage, and employment lead young people to construct fantasies about changing their familiar geographical spaces (Bernard et al., 2014; Lulle, 2024).

Students who enter the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties from rural areas are suddenly exposed to a large and diverse society. As revealed in this study, social influences such as interactions within social networks, engagement with students from various social strata and disciplines, as well as the stories shared by university lecturers who have studied abroad, and the fact that many young lecturers who go overseas for higher education do not return to Sri Lanka have contributed to the development of migration fantasies among these students.

“When our young lecturers go to developed countries for their studies, they don’t come back. They only return if they go to places like China or India. A lecturer who had been to New Zealand once spoke about the country. After hearing that, I also felt like going to New Zealand after completing my degree” (IDIT-i-18: Female student, 24 years old, from the rural dry zone; interview conducted on 2025.02.25).

The Cumulative Causation & Social Influence Theory explains that young people’s decision to change their familiar living space is not always a rational act based on their own personal needs, but rather occurs as a result of fantasies constructed under social influence. This theory, developed by (Myrdal, 1957), can also be applied to analyse the migration dreams of students studying in the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties in Sri Lanka regarding their future living environments. According to the theory, when the social group a person belongs to collectively attempts to migrate to a certain geographical space, that individual may develop migration fantasies, even without a specific personal reason (Korinek et al., 2025; Myrdal, 1957). In particular, social conversations, parental influence, the migration of friends, public opinion, and current migration trends all shape individual psychology and behaviour (Korinek et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study conducted on the future living geo-spaces desired by undergraduate students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Ruhuna primarily revealed that complex psychological factors analysed within the discipline of human behavioural geography have significantly influenced their fantasised geographical areas. Key among these factors are age, education, social influence, psychological perception, and global geopolitical imaginaries. According to the findings, 99% of the surveyed students believe that they must change their current living geographical space. The majority of these students’ fantasies are directed toward Western capitalist countries, particularly those dominated by Anglo-Saxon populations where English is the mother tongue and which exert political and economic autonomous power. This condition has been confirmed by the study as being rooted in Sri Lanka’s colonial history under British rule, and reflects the constructed relationship between autonomy and hegemony. Furthermore, the study clearly shows that the students’ fantasies are oriented toward the capitalist core, reflecting aspirations for migration. This overwhelming preference indicates a strong and interconnected relationship with the global core-periphery dynamic. Within this dynamic, Western capitalist countries are imagined by students as spaces that offer freedom and security, whereas Sri Lanka is perceived as a peripheral state, incapable of ensuring those same conditions. This perception shapes their desire to migrate and reflects a broader, systemic pattern of global inequality embedded within youth aspirations.

It became evident that the geospatial fantasies of students studying in the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences can be theoretically analysed through several key theories, including World Systems Theory, Place Attachment Theory, Behavioural Decision-Making Theory, Life-Course Migration Theory, and Cumulative Causation and Social Influence Theory. What clearly emerged is that students’ fantasies and aspirations regarding migration are not based solely on eco-

conomic reasoning, but are shaped by complex behavioural geographical fantasies, constructed through imaginaries of place, narratives of peers of similar age, dominant notions of success, and prevailing social ideals. In particular, rural students who enter the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences begin to mentally detach from their familiar rural geographies through education, which contributes to the construction of fantasised future migration aspirations. The study revealed that exposure to broader social discourse enables these rural students to transcend class and mental spatial boundaries, and that their desire to construct new identities is expressed through the reorientation of their life-spaces toward capitalist countries.

Ultimately, this study emphasises that the migration fantasies of undergraduate students in the Humanities and Social Sciences are not merely isolated personal desires, but are deeply rooted in global inequalities, local socio-cultural conditions, and theoretical structures tied to place, identity, and spatial specificities. This situation contributes to brain drain and hinders the realisation of national educational goals of Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is essential that the existing local void that fuels these youth migration fantasies is addressed at the state policy level. These findings are significant for policy-makers, as they offer a critical basis to re-evaluate the current situation and consider how to retain the future life aspirations and spatial dreams of Humanities and Social Science graduates within their own country.

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The Influence of Rational Competency on Business Performance: The Mediating Role of Business Uncertainty among Private Ayurveda Practitioners in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Although Ayurveda has a strong cultural foundation and economic opportunities, scholars highlighted that Private Ayurveda Practitioners (PAPs) in Sri Lanka face heavy competition in the marketplace with Western medicine and poor capabilities of strategic decision making. The study attempts to empirically examine how the rational competency of PAPs affects the business uncertainty and thereby the business performance of PAPs in the Gampaha District of Sri Lanka, employing a quantitative method. Data was gleaned through a pre-tested structured questionnaire among 114 PAPs selected employing a multi-stage sampling technique, and the primary data was mainly analyzed with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results show that there is a negative effect of rational competency on business uncertainty, which implies that the greater information access, processing, and decision-making abilities reduce business uncertainty among the PAPs. Further, rational competency displays a positive and significant effect on business performance, as it is proven that evidence-based decision-making ability contributes to improving the business performance among the PAPs. The study further revealed that business uncertainty mediates the relationship between rational competency and the business performance of PAPs. The findings contribute to substantial theoretical, empirical, and contextual knowledge gaps and offer new insights on the Ayurveda healthcare business. The study empirically underlines that rational competency is a viable strategic weapon to mitigate business uncertainties and improve business performance among PAPs in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Business Performance, Business Uncertainty, Private Ayurveda Practitioners, Rational Competency

INTRODUCTION

One of the distinctive and unique systems of healthcare rooted in Ayurveda, having originated thousands of years ago, occupies an unyielding status in Sri Lanka's cultural and traditional backdrop (Mihiranie et al., 2020). Ayurveda has become a faith among the generations, delivering exclusive and special cures to the people (Jones & Liyanage, 2018). Although the Ayurveda healthcare sector in Sri Lanka holds a lot of importance, it still the sector faces some challenges. Sri Lanka's Ayurveda sector has not received international accreditation to a certain standard, and Western medical practices have steadily encroached on the healthcare market (Suresh, 2018). In the given backdrop of globalization in the sphere of health care, Sri Lanka's Ayurveda sector, therefore, can be considered relatively protected. Competition in the market that challenges Ayurveda practitioners are high because Western medical practices dominate the

healthcare market (Jones & Liyanage, 2018). This implies that the Ayurveda healthcare sector has a challenge to compete with Western healthcare sector.

The process of creating of Ayurveda as an efficient business is full of obstacles, the major ones are derived from the business environment, including customer demand and taste, input supply, quality certification, and changes in rules and regulations that are regarded as major constraints (Rajapakshe & Arachchi, 2022). The business environment for the Ayurveda healthcare sector is always uncertain and regularly changed (Rajapakshe & Arachchi, 2022; Simon, 1990). The existing complex business environment led to increased business uncertainty for the Ayurveda healthcare business (James et al., 2020). Ayurveda practitioners need to formulate strategic decisions to manage the regular business uncertainty that improves business performance (Y. Zhang &

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Zhang, 2013). If a business can predict future behavior of the business environment by accessing information, assessing information, and making business decisions based on the information assessed, the business can manage the business uncertainty that helps to increase business performance (Yenidogan, 2013). No empirical evidence in the literature shows whether Ayurveda practitioners have managed business uncertainty successfully by accessing to information, assessing them to make rational decisions. If they fail to manage business uncertainty, they fail to achieve business performance.

On realizing the extent to which human rationality is bound, there is a possibility of decision-making to be more real to manage the uncertainties in the decision-making process (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). Research work conducted on the relationship between rationality, performance, uncertainty, and business results separately, or in bilateral has been conducted in different countries for different businesses (Boubaker & Cellier, 2020). Rationality has been the focus of many papers revealing that it has a positive effect on the performance of organizations and improves business performance (Foss & Pedersen, 2002; Haleblan & Finkelstein, 1993). Likewise, many scholars have investigated the relationship between uncertainty and business performance as they acknowledge the fact that dynamic nature of the external environment, from the occurrence of economic crises to market volatility, have substantial influences on business performance (Madsen et al., 2018; Rajwani et al., 2018). But, as most of these individual examinations are carried out, there appears to be a lacuna in the current literature as it is found that there is no other research study in the extant literature that explores comprehensively how rational competency impacts business uncertainty, and business performance, especially in the PAPS in Sri Lanka. This research will therefore seek to fill this gap by examining the effect of rational competency on business uncertainty and business performance of PAPS in Sri Lanka.

Subsequently, the outcomes of the research will be beneficial for theory validation, providing empirical evidence in the context of Ayurveda practitioners to confirm the existing knowledge about the concept of rationality, the presence of uncertainty, and its impact on business performance. The results of the research will help provide a set of recommendations and prescriptions for the Ayurveda professionals in Sri Lanka in terms of decision-making skills, coping with business uncertainty, and building better business performance. The following section of this paper reviews the theoretical background, then develops a theoretical framework with hypotheses to investigate. The third section of this paper explains the methodology, the fourth section presents the results and discussion, and finally a conclusion is made.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this study, three theories have been identified, which will act as the theoretical foundation for this work. Firstly, Bounded Rationality Theory advocated by Simon (1990) arise from Porter's Critique of Rationality Theory due to the lack of full rationality in the decision-making process. Secondly, Transaction Cost Theory, as explained by Williamson, (1979), defines Business Uncertainty and gives two dimensions namely Environmental and Behavioral Uncertainty. Third, according to Neely et al. (1995) Business Performance is a rather complex set that, however, contain such kinds of

measurements as financial performance, operational performance, market share, customers' satisfaction and employees' productivity, which show the company's efficiency now.

Rational Competency: Rationality, also known as rational behavior, entails the intellectual skill of performing rational tasks, particularly any involvement in the formulation of sound judgment in civilizing systems (Simon, 1955). Decision making is the capacity to acquire, evaluate, and make effective decisions that conform to one's purposes as well as standards (Williamson, 1985). Rational competency refers to the access and evaluate available information, the capability to think logically, and make strategic decisions to manage uncertainty (Kahneman, 2003). Logical proficiency comprises of several parameters that all put together define the rational competency in people (Yousuf, 2017). Information competence is one of the components that constitute rational competency and refers to a learner's capacity to find, assess, and use information to acquire relevant and credible information (Tewell, 2015). High information literacy enables the persons to find useful information to function in the process of their decision making (Everaert et al., 2010).

Another aspect of rational competency is the evaluation of information source. This skill enables people to evaluate the believability and reliability of information sources, the expertise of the provider of information (Kuhlthau et al., 2008). As a result, authors or publishers of the information, or potential biases, and the level of credibility of the source can be used to assess the reliability and relevance of the source. The other element includes evidence analysis; the capacity to look at evidence, differentiate between fact and opinion, identify fallacies, see merits and demerits, and identify backing up information (Murdoch-Eaton et al., 2010). When evidence is properly critiqued, people will make appropriate decisions, and actions will be based on rationality.

Critical thinking is a remarkable component made up of rational prowess, which entails the application of reasoning mechanisms, weighing of arguments, adoption of other standpoints, and formulation of reasonable verdicts from credible facts (Tewell, 2015). Through critical thinking, an individual can question and or filter information based on certain set criteria or parameters, where he or she will be able to make conclusions that are logical. More importantly, rational abilities pertain to research abilities, where it indicates the mastery of research, involving the creation of research questions, formulation of methodologies or designing the methods of data accumulation and analysis, and the capability to arrive at sound conclusions (Noonan et al., 2011). Holding good research skills, a person can identify an area of interest, analyze information, and contribute to the knowledge base of a given subject area.

Business Uncertainty: Business uncertainty means that at a certain period, one or several aspects of the business environment, organization's operation, or management do not have a specific, clear, or easily predictable picture of the conditions, circumstances, or events that may occur in the future (Postma & Liebl, 2005). It is characterized by information failure, variability, and unpredictable qualities. In a business context, uncertainty can stem from factors, including technology, market trends, new and emerging laws

and/or policies, economic swings, political instability, disasters, events, and others (Yousuf, 2017). Moreover, it should not be confused with occurrences such as new technologies, changes in consumer preferences, modifications to the laws and regulations, fluctuations in the economy, instabilities in political systems, natural disasters, and epidemics (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). This causes problems for organizations' resource commitments, strategic directions, investments, and risk mitigation anus. Despite the lack of a set of business uncertainty dimensions, there can be defined dimensions or factors that characterize business uncertainty and its effect on businesses (Chen et al., 2018). Environmental uncertainty is one of the dimensions of business uncertainty; other dimensions are economic, technological, market, and regulatory and political uncertainties (Fynes et al., 2005). Economic uncertainty, therefore, refers to the lack of stability within the macro environment, which encompasses market forces. There is the regulatory environment, the technological environment, competitive forces, and the sociopolitical environment (Yousuf, 2017).

The volatility, complexity, and novelty related to technologies that organizations face are captured by technological uncertainty. Market uncertainty covers the nature of the variations in customers and competitors and involves considering factors like customer behavior, trends, competitors, and needs, changes in the trends in the market, and changes in the market environment (Zhou & Li, 2010). The objective aspect that may affect the decisions of firms and corporations is regulatory and political uncertainty, which includes all changes in regulations, policies, and political situations affecting the business, including governmental interferences, shifts in policies, trade agreements, and political conditions (Song & Montoya-Weiss, 2001). One of the forms of business uncertainty can be outlined to be behavioral uncertainty. This includes social and cultural risk, which in turn measures changes in social trends, culture and demographics among others. External conditions that cause behavioral uncertainty include social factors like attitude changes, preferences, and cross-cultural differences. Additionally, the self-interest of customers, suppliers, and the stakeholders may result in business transactions and relations uncertainties. Mitigating these uncertainty dimensions is invaluable for organizations to respond adequately, make effective decisions, and effectively cope with uncertain business environments (Fu, 2023).

Business Performance: It can be defined as the assessment and accomplishment of an organization's objectives. It extends to the different facets of business performance, such as financial returns, performance efficiency, market niche, consumer satisfaction, and personnel output (Zollo & Meier, 2008). Business performance can be defined as the level of achievement of business strategies, the efficient use of organizational assets, goals, and objectives. Business performance management refers to the systematic and comprehensive evaluation of the organizational effectiveness and efficiency in creating and communicating value to the stakeholders (Franco-Santos et al., 2007). Business performance can be measured using various key dimensions. The financial position of an organization is analyzed using its solvency, sustainability, revenue generation, return on investment, and cash position. This dimension includes revenue, profitability, or gross return on asset and or marking and stake-

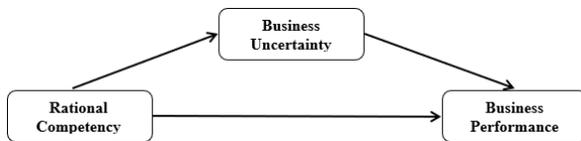
holder value (Badri et al., 2000). The next is operational performance, more narrowly defined, which signifies the smooth efficiency of the key processes that support an organization's center. This entails production, supply chain, quality assurance and even distribution. This dimension includes general measures such as cycle time, yield rate, delivery time, and inventory turnover to name a few. Customer performance check how well an organization performs on its customers' expectations. Customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer retention rates, market share, and customer acquisition are all within it. The employees' productivity, commitment, and satisfaction are captured in this dimension concerning the organization that has delivered excellent customer experiences (Abu Kasim & Minai, 2009). This dimension of major measures include employee turnover, employees' absenteeism, training and development activities, and employee satisfaction questionnaires. This dimension recognizes the importance of a motivated and competent staff to enhance total organizational performance. Innovation performance refers to the extent of innovativeness of an organization and its capacity to produce new products or services or its capability in responding to changes in the market environment. Key dimensions include research and development investment; new products; patents; and innovation capability, which measured the ability of an organization to support innovativeness (Dong et al., 2021). These business performance indicators offer detailed insights into the general efficiency of an organization. It is possible to make a precise performance evaluation by considering financial, operational, customer, employee, as well as innovation perspectives, and make the right decision for the sustainable development of any organization (Richard et al., 2009).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Many research studies have shown that uncertainty, especially in a business environment, prevents overall performance (Hitt et al., 2001). As a result, organizations operating in environments with high levels of uncertainty initiate negative financial, operational, and customer satisfaction (Benner & Tushman, 2003). To find a way to deal with uncertainty and its implications for the performance of businesses rational competency comes into the picture. Rational competency relates to the extent that employees are capable of logical thinking, problem solving and analytical problem solving and decision making in a complex or an uncertain environment (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). The authors have observed that there is a positive correlation between rational competency and performance outcomes across an array of contexts in the studies of Ployhart and Bliese (2006). When the effect of uncertainty is considered, it is found that rational competency increases business performance because of the mediating effect of uncertainty. Since rational competency empowers people to gather information, evaluate it, infer from it, and apply it, depending on the situation that may prevail at any one time (Peng & Kievit, 2020), it becomes a way of overcoming the adverse effects of uncertainty. Thus, the higher rational competency means that specific individuals are better equipped to minimize the negative impact of uncertainty on their business outcomes (Song et al., 2018). Based on the above evidence, this study hypothesizes that rational competency has a direct causal relationship with business performance and that this relationship is moderated by the level of uncertainty. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework applied in this research; rational competency is the independent variable, business

performance is the dependent variable, and uncertainty is the mediating variable. Thus, this research seeks to uncover how this relationship can be helpful for a better understanding of rational competency's contributions to minimize the impact of uncertainty on business outcomes.

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model



Source: Developed by the Researcher, 2025.

Rationality as competency and business performance: A similar logical competency has been positively and significantly correlated with numerous types of business performances in empirical research of diverse fields of study. Research has done a good job of showing that an increased rational competency causes employees to possess decision-making skills that have a positive impact on various aspects of business (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). For example, Smith & Johnson (2010) when testing rational thinking among the managers, it was established that those with high rationality made sound decisions that positively impacted on financial returns and operational effectiveness. Moreover, rational competency research indicates that it strengthens the capability for problem-solving and versatility, which are vital to plan and manage resource utilization, create and implement innovations to drive business success (Min et al., 2014; Peng & Kievit, 2020). Chen et al. (2018) also affirm that rational competency in organizational employees makes it easy for organizations to establish market opportunities that enhance market shares and growth.

Based on such cross-industry and context replications, it is logical to expect such a rational competency-business performance association among the Ayurveda practitioners owning private clinics in Sri Lanka. While the sector of Ayurveda is different, primary forms of rational competency that include critical thinking, efficient decision making, and flexibility are also likely to improve a business position in this area as well. In addition, economic risk conditions and the rise of comprehensive and medical evidence requirements meet the criteria for rational competency. As with other fields, those dedicated to Ayurveda will also have to manage different scenarios, make proper decisions, and use resources more efficiently to have a successful practice. Consequently, the association identified between rational competency and business performance in prior literature fits logically when transferring the connection to Sri Lankan Ayurveda private practitioners. Therefore, the study assumes that.

H1: Rational competency is positively related to the business performance of private Ayurveda practitioners.

Rational Competency and business Uncertainty: In general, results gained from empirical studies have pointed out that rational competency is highly correlated with business uncertainty. Many works prove that the possession of higher levels of rational competency ensures effectiveness in working in conditions of higher uncertainty and business complexity. For instance, Min et al. (2013) determine a positive

relationship between rational thinking disposition and decision-making style, which makes an individual to make more rational decisions. This inclination towards rational decision making has been related to lower uncertainty in different other organizational environments (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Further, Smith and Johnson (2010) also embraced the concept of individual adaptability as the means of reducing the effects of uncertainty on the strategies of an organization. They suggested their study showed that more adaptable employees would be able to manage and react to the uncertain environment better, and accordingly, organizational outcomes would be better. This is in line with Peng and Kievit's (2020) work, which noted that people's personality determines how their thinking process and their approach to dealing with vagueness and doubt. Considering these empirical findings, it can be hypothesized that a similar path exists between rational competency and business uncertainty regarding Ayurveda practitioners in Sri Lanka with their own businesses. The Ayurvedic industry, like any other field of manufacturing, trade, and services, can face up to economic changes and uncertain conditions. Thus, the improved rational competency may help practitioners to address the issues connected to unpredictable market conditions, changes of regulations, and shifts in customers' preferences.

H2: Rational competency has a negative influence of the business uncertainty of private Ayurveda practices.

Business uncertainty and business performance: The results obtained from empirical analysis of the relationship between business uncertainty and business performance also suggest a complex and strong positive correlation that holds across industries and settings. Smith and Johnson (2010) reveal that if business uncertainty increases, business performance will decrease. This was found to hold across sectors, which showed that uncertainty affects the business success and efficiency (Smith & Johnson, 2010). Furthermore, Ployhart and Bliese (2006) established that when operations were more uncertain, business organizations are likely to encounter some level of disruption affecting productivity and financial performance (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). The rationale is based on the argument that the characteristics of business uncertainty and, consequently, the effect on performance can be transferred to the analysis of other industries, including the Ayurveda sector in Sri Lanka.

H3: Business Uncertainty has a negative relationship with the business performance among private Ayurveda practitioners.

Mediating role of business uncertainty: Applied studies have always supported the relationship between rational competency, business uncertainty, and business performance. Lee et al. (2015) have it that increased rational competency among the business leaders enhances on uncertainty management. This is due to a capacity to understand contexts, evaluate hazards, and make proper decisions, thereby moderating the influence of uncertainty in a negative manner (Lee et al., 2015). Also, Song et al., (2018) concluded that lower uncertainty was associated with better business performance, implying that managing uncertainty boosts benefits (Song et al., 2018). This logical connection implies that rational competency moderates between uncertainty and

business performance. Since rational competency helps individuals to perform well under conditions of risk and uncertainty, it automatically reduces uncertainty, which in turn boosts business performance (Lee et al., 2015; Song et al., 2018). This mediation underscores the reason why the negative impacts of uncertainty on performance are minimized. Because similar observations have been made in various business environments, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the same relationship holds for the Ayurveda business environment as well. Therefore, it is expected that the mediating effect of rational competency would similarly apply to practitioners of Ayurveda in Sri Lanka.

H4: Business uncertainty has a mediating effect on the relationship between rational competency and the business performance of private Ayurveda practitioners.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a positivist paradigm, and the approach is deductive and explanatory since the study variables, i.e., rational competency, business uncertainty, and business performance, have a strong theoretical base, and the study hypotheses have been developed by integrating those theories. Therefore, the study employed a quantitative method. The survey method was conducted to collect data from the Ayurveda practitioners, which is the unit of analysis of the study. The study uses a multi-stage sampling to select the sample from PAPs in Sri Lanka. Firstly, the Gampaha District was selected using a simple random sampling method out of 25 districts to represent the whole of Sri Lanka. According to the Department of Ayurveda - Western Province, there are 644 PAPs in the Gampaha District. Secondly, the sample size from the population was calculated using the sample size determination formula with the support of Raosoft.com (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). From the total, the sample size was 114 PAPs. The selected sample size was sufficient based on PLS-SEM guidelines, which explained that the minimum sample size should be at least 10 times of the number of structural paths managed at any endogenous constructs or the largest number of indicators employed to evaluate a construct (Hair et al., 2014). In this study, only 02 structural paths are directed to the endogenous constructs, and 07 indicators were used to measure business uncertainty. Therefore, 90 cases were enough for the sample, and 114 cases exceeded the threshold. Finally, the sample units were selected using simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected from PAPs for a pre-tested structural questionnaire having face to face interviews with the participants.

As demonstrated in Table 1, the study measured rational competency of PAPs using 3 dimensions, i.e., ability to access information (using 4 items), assess information (using 3 items), and ability to make business decisions (using 3 items), adopted by Priyanath and Premaratne (2017a), Williamson (1981), Williamson (1985) and Zhang (2009). Business uncertainty was measured using two dimensions, i.e., environmental uncertainty and behavioural uncertainty, as shown in Table 1. Environmental uncertainty was evaluated using demand uncertainty (using 4 items), supply uncertainty (using 3 items), political uncertainty (using 3 items), and technological uncertainty (2 items), adopted by Priyanath & Premaratne (2017b); Schneider et al. (2010); and Sorrentino et al. (2003). Table 03 further displays that the

behavioural uncertainty was measured employing opportunistic behaviour of customers, suppliers, and stakeholders adopted by Anderson and Weitz (1992), Heide and John (1992), and Sorrentino et al. (2003). Finally, the table 01 shows that the business performance was measured using financial performance (using 4 items), growth performance (using 4 items), customer satisfaction (using 7 items), employee performance (using 5 items), and social performance (using 3 items) adopted by; (Liang et al., 2007; Priyanath & Buthsala, 2017; Tarutė & Gatautis, 2014). All the items were measured employing a 7-point Likert scale from 01 = strongly disagree and 07 = strongly agree.

Data were analysed mainly using PLS-SEM, which helps to test the study hypotheses in a reliable and valid manner. The analysis was based on a two-step procedure, first the study developed variables testing the reliability and validity of the variables. Indicator reliability of each questionnaire item was tested using factor loadings, which were greater than 0.7, and t-statistics, which were greater than 1.96. Internal consistency reliability of each construct was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR), which was greater than 0.7, and Cronbach's Alpha (CA), which was greater than 0.5. Convergent validity and discriminant validity were used to decide the validity of each construct. Second, the study tests hypotheses using a structural model following the steps suggested by Hair et al. (2014). First, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to assess multicollinearity in the structural model. Next, the path coefficients were checked, and t-statistics and p-values were used to assess the path coefficients. Finally, the section also consists of the evaluation of the explanatory power of the model based on R-squared values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample for this study consists of 114 Ayurveda practitioners who operate private practices within the Gampaha District, Sri Lanka. Regarding the type of services offered, the sample includes both general Ayurveda practitioners, who offer a wide range of traditional treatments, and specialists, who focus on areas such as Panchakarma therapy, dermatological care, or musculoskeletal treatments. This ensures the inclusion of diverse practice types and therapeutic approaches within the Ayurvedic field. The sample also includes practitioners with varying levels of professional experience, ranging from early-career professionals with 1-5 years of practice, to mid-career practitioners with 6-15 years of experience, and highly experienced practitioners with over 15 years of practice. This mix allows the study to capture insights from different stages of professional development and how rational competency may influence business outcomes at each level. Additionally, the sample includes a balance of gender and age groups, although gender was not a primary stratification factor. Most participants hold formal qualifications in Ayurveda, such as the Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery, and some also possess postgraduate training or certifications in specific Ayurvedic therapies.

Inferential analysis was done using PLS-SEM with the support of smartPLS -Version 4. The analysis process is followed a two-step procedure: measurement model (develop variables in a reliable and accepted manner) and the structural model (hypotheses testing).

First-Order Measurements: The first-order measurements were evaluated by means of four main criterion points that are indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Table 01 demonstrates the indicator reliability, showing factor loadings which are greater than 0.7 and t-stat that was greater than

1.96. Convergent validity was measured using the values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Table 01 further shows that all the AVE values of variables were found to be greater than 0.50, which validated that the convergent validity of the latent variables are satisfied.

Table 01: Reliability and Convergent Validity of First-Order Constructs.

Con-struct	Construct	Indicator Re- liability		Internal Con- sistency Reli- ability	Internal Con- sistency Reli- ability	Conver- gent valid- ity
Con-struct	Construct	Loading	t-statistics	CA	CR	AVE
B1	Demand Uncertainty			0.836	0.891	0.772
B1	I can predict how many pa- tients will want to see me at my private clinic in the fu- ture	0.874	47.614			
B1	I can predict my private clinic's future sales income with ease.	0.828	21.843			
B1	I can predict how my ser- vice(s)' price will behave in the future with ease.	0.801	22.951			
B1	For my own practice, I have a steady clientele.	0.771	17.545			
B2	Supply Uncertainty			0.807	0.886	0.722
B2	I have no trouble predicting how the market will behave in relation to the inputs I uti- lize at the clinic to provide services (drugs, equipment, etc.).	0.884	44.705			
B2	I am able to forecast market pricing for inputs (drugs, equipment, etc.) that the clinic uses to provide ser- vices with ease.	0.824	36.672			
B2	I can always find materials for my private clinic.	0.839	41.139			
B3	Political Uncertainty			0.776	0.870	0.690
B3	I am able to forecast how government tax regulations will act in the future.	0.806	21.087			
B3	I am able to forecast how the government will act in the future when it comes to trade, price, and market reg- ulation.	0.858	45.849			
B3	I am able to forecast how government environmental policies will act in the future.	0.827	29.433			
B4	Technological Uncertainty			0.670	0.858	0.752
B4	I am able to forecast how technology will behave in the future.	0.860	37.734			
B4	I can deal with the chal- lenges of adjusting to new technology.	0.874	44.623			
C1	Supplier Behavior			0.918	0.936	0.711

	My input providers don't give us clear information when they offer us inputs, thus I can't trust them.	0.761	16.518			
	Input providers consistently modify agreements in order to reap further rewards.	0.826	25.598			
	The majority of input providers are typically dishonest during transactions.	0.838	31.418			
	In general, the majority of input providers perform poorly in transactional operations.	0.824	28.728			
	There is a significant chance that my input suppliers may act opportunistically.	0.892	48.877			
D1	Buyer Opportunism			0.804	0.872	0.631
	Most of the time, during transaction execution, patients alter the pre-agreed facts.	0.856	36.938			
	In general, the majority of patients engage in dishonesty during transactions.	0.781	19.573			
	The majority of the time, patients alter their transactions unfairly while carrying out the transaction.	0.801	27.809			
	Most patients typically try to violate the terms of the agreement.	0.733	11.118			
D2	Supplier Opportunism			0.824	0.884	0.655
	When negotiating the transaction, input suppliers don't always provide the real information regarding the agreement.	0.864	31.008			
	During transaction negotiations, input suppliers do not act honest.	0.753	14.894			
	I can expect our input providers to make requests for reductions.	0.802	24.823			
	Suppliers frequently alter the terms of the transaction unfairly while it is being carried out.	0.815	28.805			
E1	Access to Information			0.760	0.848	0.582
	I can easily find new markets and patients for my clinic.	0.763	17.814			
	I can easily find information about patients for my clinic.	0.732	16.514			
	I can easily identify the activities of the competitors.	0.798	20.655			
	I can easily find accurate information about raw materials and inputs.	0.757	16.604			
E2	Assessment of Information			0.691	0.829	0.618
	I am competent at analyzing the data required to determine how my service's market price behaves.	0.838	40.421			

	When buying raw materials for my clinic, I am able to assess the necessary information on the behavior of market prices quite well.	0.754	12.381			
	Regarding the threats posed by competitors in my service industry, I have a good assessment.	0.764	13.660			
E3	Decision Making Ability			0.789	0.864	0.614
	I have a good capability to make proper decisions.	0.782	21.580			
	I have a good capability to identify the market behaviour of the raw materials and make the proper decision on purchasing them.	0.832	29.717			
	I have a good capability to make the decision to avoid threats from competitors.	0.718	15.656			
F1	Financial Performance			0.913	0.933	0.699
	My monthly sales volume has increased during the last few years.	0.839	30.209			
	My monthly income has increased during the last few years.	0.853	40.801			
	My profit has increased during last few years.	0.750	17.928			
	Over the past few years, my number of service complaints has decreased.	0.833	28.036			
	My stock movement has increased during the last few years.	0.857	38.109			
G1	Growth Performance			0.842	0.888	0.614
	I opened a new center last year.	0.728	17.005			
	The number of employees working in my clinic increased during the last few years.	0.786	21.793			
	I have established new buildings for the clinic in the last few years.	0.854	36.002			
	I established new equipment for my clinic last year.	0.769	18.781			
	I have increased my investments in the clinic in the last few years.	0.776	20.099			
H1	Customer Satisfaction			0.933	0.945	0.681
	My customer feedback on our service has been increased for last year.	0.830	31.912			
	I always accept the customer's requests and change the quality of service accordingly to achieve their satisfaction.	0.738	16.742			
	I introduce new services to the market according to the customer request during last few years.	0.826	31.359			
	The number of customers in each marketing area has	0.838	33.914			

	been increased during the last few years.				
	The number of complaints on my service(s) received from customers has decreased in the last few years.	0.860	40.475		
	The frequency of repeating clients has been increased in the last few years.	0.838	39.253		
	The popularity of my trade-name has been increased during the last few years.	0.811	22.968		
I1	Employee Satisfaction			0.861	0.900
	I have increased the expenditure for training programs for my employees during the last few years.	0.798	27.323		
	I provide gifts and bonuses for my employees and increase them every year.	0.778	23.217		
	The resignations from employees have been decreased during the last few years.	0.856	34.010		
	I increase employees' salaries in every year.	0.762	22.607		
	I increase investments for employee's welfare every year.	0.813	26.618		
J1	Environmental Performance			0.821	0.894
	I have established a policy on environmental protection and continue it.	0.854	32.040		
	I have increased the investment in controlling environmental pollution during the last few years.	0.813	24.765		
	I follow the government rules and regulations on environmental protection and changed my practice accordingly.	0.908	77.056		
K1	Social Performance			0.811	0.913
	I allocate a portion of job opportunities for employees who represent less income groups.	0.903	58.438		
	I allocate the amount of money for social welfare activities each year.	0.931	109.659		

Source: Survey Data Analysis, 2025.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was deployed in assessing the discriminant validity, i.e., the square root of AVE of each construct had to be higher than the correlation of any construct

with the remaining constructs. This condition was met, as can be seen in Table 2, which means that every construct is unique and that it gauges the intended latent concept.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity- First Order.

	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3	F1	G1	H1	I1	J1	K1
B1	.87															
B2	.84	.84														
B3	.82	.79	.83													
B4	.79	.69	.65	.86												
C1	.82	.82	.82	.79	.84											
D1	.68	.69	.60	.60	.64	.79										
D2	.68	.66	.62	.64	.68	.73	.81									
E1	.65	.70	.65	.57	.71	.62	.63	.76								
E2	.70	.69	.75	.64	.76	.59	.71	.73	.78							
E3	.77	.73	.70	.67	.80	.67	.67	.71	.83	.78						
F1	.82	.76	.78	.75	.83	.72	.78	.77	.80	.73	.83					
G1	.72	.70	.78	.69	.74	.68	.66	.73	.73	.74	.76	.78				
H1	.81	.82	.81	.76	.82	.71	.79	.61	.81	.76	.71	.73	.82			
I1	.75	.75	.76	.78	.72	.67	.67	.71	.72	.72	.65	.72	.78	.80		
J1	.79	.77	.72	.73	.81	.61	.65	.72	.72	.78	.78	.70	.74	.83	.85	
K1	.84	.76	.75	.79	.80	.68	.71	.69	.74	.75	.64	.73	.77	.89	.83	.91

Source: Survey Data Analysis, 2025.

Second-Order Measurements: Over and above their first-order validations, higher-order (second order) constructs were fitted, being able to describe larger dimensions like overall environmental uncertainty, behavioral uncertainty,

rational ability, and business performance (see Table 03). The validity of these second-order constructs was addressed by a reflective-reflective method in the sense that the lower-order items are sound in their depiction of the higher-order construction.

Table 03: Reliability and Convergent Validity of Second-Order Constructs.

Con-struct	Construct	Indicator Re-liability	Indicator Relia-bility	Internal Con-sistency Relia-bility	Internal Con-sistency Relia-bility	Con-ver-gent valid-ity
Con-struct	Construct	Loading	t-statistics	CA	CR	AVE
1	Uncertainty			0.951	0.960	0.774
	B1. Demand	0.940	103.818			
	B2. Supply	0.910	59.460			
	B3. Economic /Political	0.878	33.597			
	B4. Technological Uncertainty	0.840	29.334			
	C1. Behavioural Uncertainty from Supplier	0.945	128.953			
	D1. Behavioural Uncertainty from Oppor-tunism of Buyer	0.814	17.753			
	D2. Opportunism of Supplier	0.824	20.094			
2	Rational Ability					
	E1. Access to the information	0.949	64.499	0.943	0.963	0.897
	E2. Assess information	0.924	167.01			
	E3. Good decision making from Evaluated Information	0.968	81.803			
3	Business Performance			0.973	0.978	0.881
	F1. Financial Performance- Profitability	0.935	218.64			
	G1. Growth	0.936	80.207			
	H1. Operational Performance – Customer Satisfaction	0.970	57.755			
	I1. Operational Performance – Employee Satisfaction	0.944	94.674			
	J1. Environmental Performance	0.910	103.81			
	K1. Social Performance	0.935	59.460			

Source: Survey Data Analysis, 2025.

In the same way that first-order measurements were done, Table 04 shows the second-order constructs passed the Fornell-Larcker criterion since the square root of AVE was high beyond the inter-construct correlation. This proves that there is conceptual and statistical independence between the higher-order construct

Table 04: Discriminant Validity of Second Order.

	BP	Rational Ability	Uncertainty
BP	0.939		
Rational Ability	0.880	0.947	
uncertainty	0.830	-0.827	0.880

Source: Survey Data Analysis, 2025.

The structural model assessment: As coined by Hair et.al (2014) the structural model is grounded in four steps that provide a pathway for a productive analysis. The first step is

assessing the structural model for identifying collinearity issues. The second step is testing hypotheses and examining the Beta values and their significance. The third step of this pathway is assessing the level of R-Squared, and the fourth step is assessing the effect sizes (f-squared). VIF values range from 1.090 to 2.555. Hence, it is apparent that there is no potential collinearity problems related to the corresponding indicators. The second step of assessing the structural model is testing hypotheses and examining the Beta values and their significance. Table 05 shows that hypothesis testing is utilized to evaluate the strength of evidence from the sample. All T-statistic values are greater than the threshold of 1.96, and all the hypotheses are accepted in this study. P-value must be smaller than 0.05 to provide the inter-connection under consideration as significant. Accordingly, all the hypotheses can be recognized as statistically significant. The study measures the mediating effect of business uncertainty on the relationship between rational competency and business performance. Table 05 further shows that the mediating effect of uncertainty partially contributes to the business performance.

Table 05: Assess the Significance and Relevance of the Structural Model Relationships.

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	T statistics	P values	Decision
Direct Effects				
Rational Competency -> BP	0.353	5.751	0.000	Accepted
Rational Competency -> Uncertainty	-0.827	28.227	0.000	Accepted
uncertainty -> BP	-0.638	10.823	0.000	Accepted
Mediating Effect of Business Uncertainty				
Rational Competency -> Uncertainty -> BP	0.527	11.265	0.000	Partial Mediating

Source: Survey Data Analysis, 2025.

The model has a high value of explanatory power expressed with the high percentage of the variance described by the independent variables (R-squared value of business performance is 0.702, while that of business uncertainty is 0.681). This implies that the predictors that have been employed in the analysis have been able to explain a substantial percentage of the variation in the dependent variable.

DISCUSSION

Table 05 demonstrates that rational competency has a strong influence on the business performance of the Ayurveda practitioners with their own practice. The hypothesis used in this paper is that a higher rational competency, i.e., higher competence in logical planning, analysis, and decision-making, is likely to bring a higher business performance outcome of Ayurveda practitioners. The coefficient of the path that ran between the rational ability and the business performance was 0.353 with its t-statistic of 5.751 and $p < 0.001$, and thus it was statistically significant and positive. It further implies that PAPs who possess good rational skills like access to information, the ability to analyze, and make a good decision, are bound to perform better in business. The results of these analyses are consistent with the ones that were obtained in past research on how rational decision-making contributes to improving profitability, customer retention, and the overall operational effectiveness (Priyanath & Premaratne, 2017b). Logical practitioners can assess the trends, forecast changes in the market, and make decisions backed by evidence that lead to earning financial stability

and sustainable growth. That having said, it is more crucial in the case of PAPs, where the professionals tend to have to combine the clinical as well as the business roles. This conclusion is consistent with the theory of entrepreneurial cognition; it is stated that rational thinking processes play an important role in identifying opportunities and seizing them in unpredictable contexts (Priyanath & Buthsala, 2017). Therefore, the problem of rational ability develops not only as a set of skills but as one of the strategies that determine the success of small health-based organizations in general.

Rational competency and business uncertainty have significant negative relationships with each other among Ayurveda practitioners in their course of practice. According to this hypothesis 02, the greater the rational competency of practitioners of Ayurveda is, i.e., their ability to plan, evaluation, and make logical decision-making; the lesser the business uncertainty level to which they will be subjected. The structural model also showed a negative relationship between rational ability and business uncertainty (beta = -0.827, $t = 28.227$, and $p < 0.001$) was strong with a negative effect. It shows that the growth of rational competencies in Ayurveda practitioners gives them a better capability of negotiating and limiting uncertainty in their business environments. Rational ability allows them to gather credible information, evaluate risks, and make time-sensitive decisions, therefore, minimizing sources of unpredictability when dealing with supply chains, patient behavior, or changes in regulations. Such results correspond to those in previous papers by (Ranatunga et al., 2020), which concluded that rational

competency contributed to the prevention of external threats within micro-enterprises through the quality of proactive decision-making. Further, it was found that the perceived uncertainty in the environment goes down with a perceived feeling of being much aware and able to analyze by the decision-makers. Practitioners can make accurate market predictions by filtering and interpreting exterior signals correctly so that they can put up contingency plans and be flexible in operations.

Business uncertainty and the business performance of Ayurveda practitioners with private practice in Sri Lanka are significantly related. According to this hypothesis, the magnitude of uncertainty experienced by the practitioners in his or her business environment, including unpredictable demand, upcoming and varying government policies, competition in the marketplace, and reliability of suppliers, can be measured to indicate the degree to which his/her practice operates successfully. The business uncertainty and performance path coefficient were highly significant and negative (-0.638, $t = 10.823$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the measured level of uncertainty with the level of business performance is negatively related in hypothesis 3. If the PAPs are faced with uncertainty, i.e., uncertain patient flows, unreliable suppliers, or poor government policies, they can become disrupted in their service delivery, wasteful in their resource allocation, and unsatisfactory to their clients. This conclusion has been supported by the research findings made in the field of strategic management since it has long been asserted that uncertainty is a limiting factor to the process of decision-making, operations planning, and performance (Priyanath & Samarathunga, 2024; Ranatunga et al., 2023). Similar associations have been found in the health care industry, where unsettled operations have been associated with a reduction in patient confidence and inefficiency (Vaughn et al., 2018). The authors of this study established that not only environmental but also behavioral uncertainties adversely affect several dimensions of performance, such as financial growth, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement.

The medium variable between the rational competency and the business performance of Ayurveda practitioners with a Sri Lankan private practice is business uncertainty. This hypothesis shows that business uncertainty is an intermediate variable regarding how or why rational competency affects business performance. That is, Ayurveda practitioners who possess high rational competency, as far as they possess positive planning, information processing, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, might be in a better position to minimize or level out these uncertainties that have occurred in their business environment. Addressing the uncertainty will position them in a more stable and predictable environment in which they operate and, at the same time, enhance the performance of businesses like financial performance, customer satisfaction, and operational effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The issue that has been investigated in this research is that Ayurveda practitioners using their own private practices in Sri Lanka tend to encounter major problems in sustaining a steady business performance since there are numerous sources of business uncertainty in their complex business environment. Although these practitioners have sound knowledge in traditional medicine, most of them do not

have the rational competencies required to enable them to plan and evaluate and make decisions to mitigate the business uncertainties that affect businesses performance. The primary purpose of the study is to analyze the influence of rational competency on the business uncertainty, thereby business performance of PAPs in Sri Lanka. The results show that there is a negative effect of rational competency on business uncertainty, which implies that the more information access ability, information processing ability, and decision-making competencies, the less the business uncertainty among the PAPs. Furthermore, rational competency displays a significant positive effect on business performance, as it has been proven that the evidence-based decision-making ability of PAPs contributes to improving business performance. The study further revealed that business uncertainty mediates the connection between rational competency and business performance of PAPs, as uncertainty is one of the most important channels through which rational competency influences business performance.

The study presents a tremendous contribution in closing some of the existing knowledge gaps as captured in the literature review. First, the study validates the theoretical basis of rational competency, business uncertainty, and business performance testing integrated model empirically in the individual private Ayurveda practice context in Sri Lanka. Secondly, it fills an empirical gap because it offers statistically confirmed support to the idea of how rational competency directly and indirectly affects business performance in a real business environment. Finally, it addresses an obvious contextual gap in that it specifically targets the Ayurveda privately-run practice arena in Sri Lanka, which has not received enough scrutiny regarding how practitioners deal with uncertainty to maintain and develop their businesses. It is through closing these gaps that this study contributes to generating new knowledge.

Considering the results, some specific measures are suggested to empower the rational competence of PAPs, as well as to diminish the business uncertainty that they must cope with. To start with, the rational decision-making training ought to be given to PAPs. To overcome the above-mentioned situation, short-term courses can be created to help practitioners acquire practical skills in information access, data analysis, financial forecasting, and data interpretation, so that they are more knowledgeable in making the right decision in a challenging healthcare market. Secondly, information asymmetry would also be substantially curtailed with the creation of centralized information portals. An exclusive and well-maintained digital tool will have to be created that will allow the user to get access to the necessary information at any given time (real-time) to crucial information, including medicine costs, evolving government regulations, patient populations, and vetted supply networks. High-quality, up-to-date information at hand, Ayurveda practitioners will be able to rely on faster but evidence-based decisions, which would reduce uncertainty and increase the efficiency of operations. Finally, uncertainty governance awareness ought to be regularly organized to enable practitioners to acquire operational skills in managing their behavior and environmental uncertainties.

Although the study is of great contribution, it has some shortcomings. To start with, only PAPs were used to collect the data, and this makes it limited in generalizability. Sec-

only, the study concentrated on the smaller group of people, which was the private practitioners, and did not include the doctors working in government. Third, it uses cross-sectional data, which cannot be used in a causal manner. Future studies may repeat the model in other parts along with other healthcare disciplines to pinpoint the applicability of the model. The longitudinal studies would also prove helpful in studying the changes in rational power and uncertainty in the course of time. Qualitative methods may add insight into the role of personal experiences and context specific items that inflate or reduce perceived uncertainty and different decision-making actions.

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An Ontological Framework for Responsibility Coordination in the Student Evaluation Processes: A Case Study from the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

In Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), student evaluation and monitoring processes remain difficult to manage due to the absence of a unified framework and systematic approach. Student Evaluation (SE) practices vary considerably across disciplines and faculties, driven by institution-specific and subject-specific policies, with inconsistencies particularly evident among arts, science, and commerce stream, even within the same HEI as observed at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. This study employed a hybrid research design that integrated the Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM) with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The research resulted in the development of an Ontological Framework for Responsibility Coordination (OFRC), created to support the entire SE process. However, the applicability of the framework was validated only within the selected Pre-Student Evaluation Phase of the HEIs. The results confirm that the proposed ontology provides a complete and consistent representation of student evaluation actors, activities, and responsibilities, with expert validation supporting its correctness and practical relevance. Explicit modelling of responsibility coordination was shown to improve accountability, transparency, and traceability, providing a validated foundation for the design of digital and Information Technology (IT) enabled student evaluation systems. The research implications are such that this framework is intended for use by system developers, offering a structured foundation that can be directly adopted during system design and implementation. Further, its integration is foreseen to bring several promising benefits, especially in supporting the digitization of evaluation processes. Among many others, such advantages include increased reliability, heightened operational efficiency, smoother workflows, and increased productivity for students and academic institutions in general.

Keywords: Evaluation and Monitoring, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Student Evaluation (SE), Process Ontologies, SE Responsibility Coordination Matrix

INTRODUCTION

The Sri Lankan public higher education system encompasses more than fifteen national universities, each with several faculties offering degree programs in Arts, Science, Management, and many other disciplines. The Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework stipulates a standard structure for Student Evaluation (SE) and for the award of qualifications, while academic quality and institutional compliance with established standards are guaranteed through the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council under the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Although there is a continuous effort towards the harmonization of the education model, there is a significant heterogeneity among universities in undergraduate testing procedures, examination practices, and monitoring processes of evaluation systems.

The attempts toward harmonization notwithstanding, transparency, accuracy, and accountability in SE do not have access to centralized and automated processes across Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Neither does any existing system of SE establish responsibility, nor is workflow tracking carried out effectively.

However, persisting inconsistencies in the current system continue to create serious difficulties in establishing uniform and fair procedures of final evaluation at undergraduate programmes. Besides, the lack of adequate monitoring functions and an institutional operating mechanism in the existing SE system limits efforts towards pursuing standardization in the higher education sector. In view of these limitations, this research proposes the development of an Ontological Framework for Responsibility Coordination in SE. This

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study is predicated on three key elements, namely: (1) developing a classification of sub-activities in respect to pre-evaluation work, (2) developing a theoretical framework in relation to responsibility coordination, and (3) illustrating the practical application of the suggested framework using matrix-based applications. Accordingly, this study develops a structured methodology for designing Information Technology (IT) enabled solutions to enhance implementation accuracy with a minimum of human error, increasing efficiency and ensuring fairness in the evaluation of undergraduate performance in Sri Lankan universities.

Despite the presence of regulatory instruments such as the Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF) and the Manual of Procedure for the Conduct of University Examinations (University Grants Commission, 1983), prior studies report persistent inconsistencies in assessment practices, responsibility allocation, and result compilation across Sri Lankan HEIs (Gunawardena, 2019; Perera & Ranasinghe, 2020). These inconsistencies are particularly evident in pre-evaluation activities, where responsibilities are implicitly assumed rather than formally defined, leading to delays, duplication of effort, and accountability gaps. However, existing literature does not provide a formalized, ontology-based approach to model student evaluation processes or to systematically coordinate responsibilities using established role assignment frameworks. This gap motivates the present study, which seeks to address the absence of structured responsibility coordination mechanisms in Sri Lankan student evaluation systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As for the assessment of undergraduate performance and even compiling the final results and performance based on specific courses, very little research has been carried out within the Sri Lankan university system. In fact, although the research backdrop is from outside Sri Lanka, the theoretical and methodological implications are essential for the definition of the digital assessment system and the accountability frameworks within the Sri Lankan higher education sector.

The 'Manual of Procedure for the Conduct of University Examinations' developed by the UGC in 1983 remains the guiding document that has the ability to influence the examination systems across the country of Sri Lanka. The manual comprehensively addresses the structure relating to transparency, consistencies, and confidentiality of the process and provides guidelines. The document is very supportive of transparency and confidentiality and does not deal with the issues of digital transformation of responsibility frameworks.

Recent studies have focused on the clarity of roles and accountability in an evaluation system. RACI itself an acronym for a standard set of role categories Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed in organizational and project management contexts-is well-known through versions such as PACSI (Perform, Accountable, Control, Suggest and Informed), RAPID (Recommend, Agree, Perform, Input and Decide), RACIQ (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed and Quality), and RASCI (Responsible, Accountable, Support, Consulted and Informed). The following sets of studies have identified that RACI, in the context of IT, healthcare, construction, and public sector projects, reduces ambiguity, promotes coordination, and results in much improved team communication. Case studies by Lee et al.

(2021) and Suhanda and Pratami (2021) point at the practical benefits of RACI within multi-stakeholder environments with some limitations-the latter, in particular, within organizational cultures expecting flexibility rather than rigid accountability structures.

Other frameworks, such as the Business Motivation Model of Object Management (Object Management Group, 2015), assert that business rules and directives require formalization so as to guide organizational behavior. Such framework supports the reasoning behind why academic evaluation systems need structured digital governance and policy enforcement. For instance, *Business Motivation Model (BMM)*-style rules might define decision boundaries, just as in the case of business directives prescribed in the form of operational policies.

Since then, research studies have contributed comprehensively to understanding student evaluation on university campuses, with a dominance of student attitudes, learning processes, and outcomes, and with little concern for evaluation and its relationship to university governance, responsibility coordination, and strategic alignment. Recently, Stravakou, (2024) has investigated evaluation and assessment processes and practices for university students in Greek universities, finding that even though more traditional evaluation processes still occur, students appreciate and find useful more diverse and authentic evaluation processes and methods, such as projects and research evaluations. Nonetheless, this study detects a series of disclosed problems regarding inconsistency, subjectivity, and lack of evaluation transparency at the department and instructor levels, indicating flaws and weaknesses in current evaluation processes and systems. By contrast, a more recent study has been published in the Journal "Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education", which investigates student evaluation processes and practices in research universities from the perspective and through the voices of institutional actors, finding, through its comprehensive methodology and research approach, that evaluation processes and practices occur and are shaped through social constructivism, discipline cultures, institutional priorities, and power relationships, rather than following institutional standardization and systematic governance. Even though this research provides valuable indications and suggestions for a better understanding of evaluation processes and practices from a constructivist perspective, still, it does not provide systematic processes for responsibility allocation and for adjustment and alignment with institutional objectives and aims (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

By contrast, a study more recent and relative to this discussion has been conducted, termed "Evaluating Students' Involvement in Research Projects", investigating, through a comprehensive study, undergraduate students' participation in research projects, with valuable outcomes and conclusions regarding their positive influence on improving their academic skills, critical thinking, and engagement, and more specifically emphasizing enhanced learning and working effectiveness and productivity (Huet et al., 2009). Still, this study points to a series of difficulties and problems related to a lack of institutional and supervisory support and structures, reflecting, thus, a lack of established systematic responsibility coordination processes and procedures.

Sri Lankan studies reveal fragmented and inconsistent assessment and grading practices in higher education institutions. None of the regulatory bodies, including SLQF and Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC), describe processes for digital result compilation, approval workflows, or allocation of responsibilities, even as they set standards (Gunawardena, 2019). The studies on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) adoption establish a certain level of readiness to adopt digital solutions in education, but none of the Sri Lankan universities has put in place an integrated electronic evaluation system with accompanying policies on responsibilities (Perera & Ranasinghe, 2020).

Design approaches in the area of ontology systems have been broadly employed for knowledge representation in a domain, representation of actor-role relations, and achieving semantic interoperability for complex information systems. Principles for engineering an ontology usually includes notion extraction, definition of a class hierarchy, representation of relations, definition of constraints, and validation (Gruber, 1993). In higher education, various e-learning systems, curricula, or e-assessment systems related to learning have employed ontologies for improvement in automation, semantic interoperability, or ease of governance. Current approaches to represent in ontologies hardly address responsibility coordination, let alone adopt role allocation representations, for example, RACI, in evaluation processes. Current studies on ontologies in related research have underplayed the aspect of validation with actual stakeholders, especially in the realm of student evaluation in higher education institutions (Staab & Studer, 2009; Uschold & Grüninger, 1996).

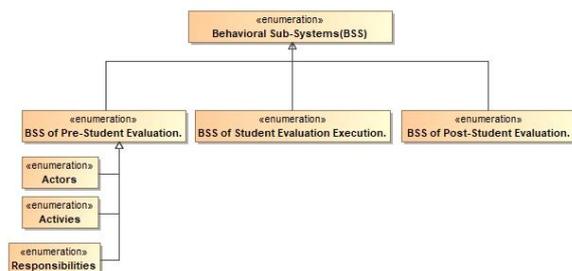
However, there are no studies found in the Sri Lankan context to investigate SE using RACI and BMM and, as a result, there is clear research gap here. By using these standards, we can identify the processes and activities of student evaluation and responsibility coordination.

Manual Assessment Systems (MAS):

Universities rely on Manual Assessment Systems (MAS), processes characterized by their complexity and time-intensive nature. The framework comprises multiple stages that unfold over an extended period, often obscuring a clear understanding of the overall workflow. To address this challenge and to support the development of an IT-Based Solution (ITBS), this study proposes a structured framework for assessment processes.

Prevailing Manual Assessment Systems (MAS) could be categorized into three specific sub-processes [Figure 1] corresponding to different stages, Pre-Evaluation, Evaluation Execution, and Post-evaluation.

Figure 1: Behavioral Stages of Manual Evaluation System.



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

I. Pre- Student Evaluation Phase (PSEP):

This process commences with the Manual Assessment System (MAS) at the first phase, where it is required to design the assessment criteria, obtain the necessary approvals, and issue relevant appointments.

II. Student Evaluation Execution Phase (SEEP):

The second stage is the Student Evaluation Execution Phase (SEEP) that occurs after the pre-Student Evaluation stage is over. Its purpose is to conduct the evaluation within the approved procedures and guidelines.

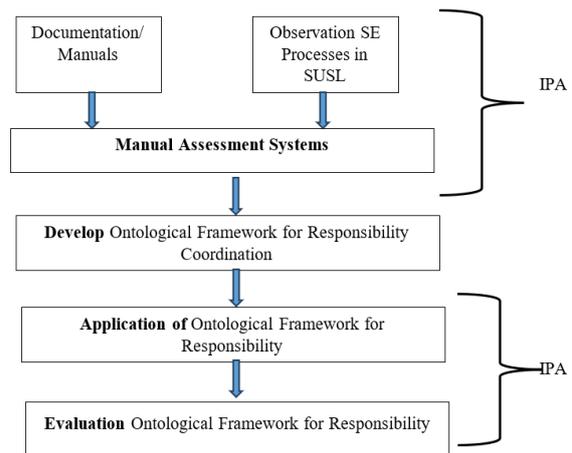
III. Post- Student Evaluation Phase (PSEP):

The focus of this phase is on the activities after an assessment takes place (i.e. after SEEP), such as marking answer scripts, producing marksheets, producing final grades, recording results, and publishing the evaluation outcomes. Also, students are given the opportunity to view their results, to clarify and/or discuss any questions, concerns, and/or complaints related to the evaluation process.

METHODOLOGY

This research typically follows two complementary hybrid paradigms [Figure 2]. This study is completed by adapting a hybrid approach combining Design Science Research Methodology (DSRM) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Design science focuses on applying knowledge to create new artifacts for human use. IPA is a qualitative research approach that is interested in the exploration of how people interpret their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Given the theories of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiographic, IPA sets out to understand meaning based on a person's subjective interpretation within particular contexts.

Figure 2: Hybrid Methodology Process for Pre-Student Evaluation.



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

For this study, the methodology adopted the Object Management Group (OMG) standard, integrating principles from both the Design Science Research Methodology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). These approaches were employed to develop an Ontological Framework for Responsibility Coordination (OFRC) for the Pre-Student Evaluation Phase in SE.

Data collection for the IPA component involved semi-structured interviews with purposively selected domain experts, including the Examination Registrar, Dean, Head of Department, and Subject Management Assistant in the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using idiographic IPA steps comprising initial noting, emergent theme development, and cross-case analysis. Ontology development followed established engineering steps, including domain concept extraction from documents and interviews, class and relationship modeling, constraint definition using responsibility rules, and expert-based validation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant faculty authority, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection.

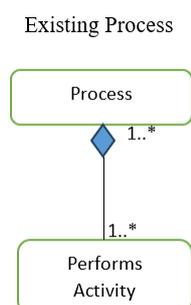
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Responsibility Coordination Matrices reveals that there is a lack of accountability processes within the manual system of student evaluation. The use of RACI roles in the application of the ontology identified shadow responsibility dependencies that were previously undocumented and helped confirm that the actor–activity relationship is complete. Additionally, expert validation identified that the ontology provides insights into educational processes that were not reflected in manual processes.

The inclusion of RACI and Business Motivation Model (BMM) principles helped to shape this ontology by relating operational roles with institution-defined rules, decision authority, and goals, such that static process descriptions were transformed into traceable system components.

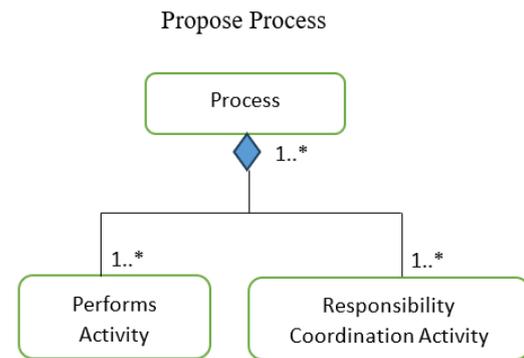
In most cases, when developing any solution pertaining to IT projects, the performance aspect within processes is likely to be overlooked. In paper-setting within a process, as in other processes, the focus is on completing the process task of setting papers, considering that the particular task is accomplished after completion [Figure 2]. In that case, many responsibilities and processes exist within the Pre-Student Evaluation Phase–Related Responsibility Coordination (PSEPRC) process that are likely to go beyond accomplishing a task. A good system is likely to be developed through considering all these factors within responsibility coordination. When the student evaluation process is conducted manually, or even in the majority of automated SE solutions [Figure 3], activities are performed without explicit responsibility coordination; the proposed process [Figure 4] enables the identification and formalization of responsibility coordination activities in addition to operational tasks.

Figure 3: Process without Responsibility Coordination Activity.



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

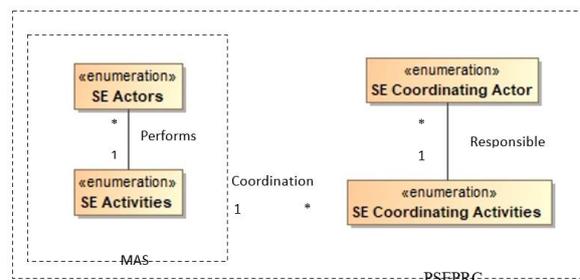
Figure 4: Process with Responsibility Coordination Activity.



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

This research identifies all the actors, activities, and responsibilities involved in the behaviour of the related responsibilities. These responsibilities and coordination activities are highly valuable for system designers when creating IT-based solutions for SE. The manual system performs the activities, but it does not clearly identify the coordination of each activity or the responsibilities of each actor [Figure 5].

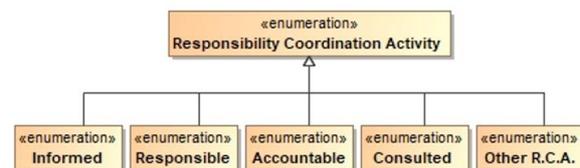
Figure 5: Meta Model for SE Processing Ontology.



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

For example, in any pre-student evaluation process, it is important to first identify the type of actor involved. Additionally, key performance factors must be defined, including who is responsible for the task, who is accountable for approval, who should be consulted, and who needs to be informed. If additional key performance factors are relevant to the process, these must also be considered to ensure a comprehensive and effective system design [Figure 4].

Figure 6: Sub-Activities of Responsibility Coordination.



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Pre-Student Evaluation Phase Related Responsibilities Coordination (PSEPRC):

This process is initiated at the earliest stage of the Manual Evaluation Process (MEP), focusing on designing the evaluation framework, scheduling the evaluation process, obtaining necessary recommendations and approvals, and issuing relevant appointments.

In the manual process of evaluation, the tasks are usually performed without a properly structured record of responsibility coordination. The research explores a responsibility coordination framework for the Pre-Student Evaluation Phase in the student Evaluation, which will be helpful to design an IT-based solution for enhancement of the SE process. Several sub-activities are considered under the umbrella of responsibility-related coordination in the SE process by the researcher, including:

1. Student Registration Related Responsibility Coordination
2. Scheduling Examination Timetable Related Responsibility Coordination
3. Nomination of Paper Setting Related Responsibility Coordination
4. Nomination of Paper Moderation Related Responsibility Coordination
5. Scheduling Examination Conduct Related Responsibility Coordination
6. Faculty Board Related Responsibility Coordination
7. Senate Board Related Responsibility Coordination

This structured approach ensures a more efficient and transparent SE process within the faculty.

Students' Registration Related Responsibilities Coordination

The process of enrolling undergraduates for examinations is a validation of their preparedness for any assessment. To date, such an exercise involves the submission of necessary documents, payment of examination fees, and validation of information about students' academic and personal details. Every effort is made to ensure accurate enrolment through the validation of the eligibility of students and subsequently enrolling them in the correct courses. This also includes filling in index numbers, assigning examination numbers, or using the existing registration number of the student to issue admit cards and update student information in the institutional database. The ability to stay within timelines and follow guidelines as specified prevents delays and disqualification. A well-structured and transparent registration process is imperative for maintaining the integrity and efficiency of the examination system. The main actors and classification of activities in the students' registration process within a university system typically include:

Students are the main participants who complete the registration process by providing the required academic and personal information.

Admissions Officer in the Examination Department are Responsible for verifying students' eligibility, processing applications, and approving enrolment. They ensure students are registered for the correct courses and exams based on their academic progress.

The Registrar's Office manages student records, course registration, and ensures compliance with academic regulations. The faculty board consists of academic staff members or coordinators who assist subject or course selection. The Finance Branch handles the examination payments, scholarships, and financial aid verification. IT Department MIS (Management Information System) Team maintains the online registration for the candidate if required. The University Administration / Faculty Board and the Senate Board approve students' deferments or overseas leave, and policies related to student registration and academic regulations. This is considered a special case.

Each actor has coordination responsibilities for the following activities. Based on the actors and activities classification, develop the Responsibility Coordination Matrix (RCM) as follows [Table 1]:

Abbreviations Used Throughout All Responsibility Coordination Matrices

AP - Assigned Personnel	ITU - Information Technology Unit
CS - Conducting Staff	M - Moderator
D - Dean	MS - Minor Staff
E - Examiner	PM - Paper Moderator
EA - Examination Administration	PS - Paper Setter
ED - Examination Department	P - Professors
F - Faculty	REB - Registrar / Examinations Department
FA - Faculty Authority	Rg - Registrar
FB - Faculty Board	S - Students
FB - Finance Branch	SMA - Subject Management Assistant
FR - Faculty Registrar	US - University Senate
HOD - Head of Department	

Table 1: Students' Registration Related Responsibilities Coordination.

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities						
	S	Rg	ITU	F	FB	EA	SMA
Submit application	R/Pe	A	C	I	-	I	-
Verify Document	C	A	-	I	-	R	Pe
Approval Admission	-	A	-	R	-	-	-
Create Student Record	-	A	R	C		I	Pe
Enrol in courses	R/Pe	C	-	A	-	-	-
Provide system Access	R	-	A/Pe	Re	-	I	-
Resolve technical issues	Re	-	R/A	Re	-	-	Pe
Process exam payment	R/Pe	C	I	I	A	-	-
Verify Payment status	C	A	-	I	R	-	Pe
Confirm Registration	C	A	I	I		R	Pe

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Definitions:

- **R - Responsible:** The person who carries out the work to complete the task.
- **A - Accountable:** The person who is ultimately answerable for the completion and outcome of the task.
- **C - Consulted:** The person who provides input or expertise before the task is completed.
- **I - Informed:** The person who is kept updated on the progress of the task.
- **Re - Request:** The person who initiates the task request.
- **Pe - Perform:** The parties carry out the task (actually doing the work).

Building on the actor and activity classification, as well as the responsibility coordination ontology, the coordination of each activity within the students' registration process of the SE system can be comprehensively documented. This systematic documentation facilitates improved monitoring and auditing of the system, while also enhancing overall accuracy.

Scheduling Examination Timetable Related Responsibilities Coordination

Scheduling an examination timetable is an important step in organizing the process of assessment. This involves assigning specific dates and times for each examination, while considering such factors as the availability of exam venues, course structures and requirements, and, when possible, student preferences. A well-thought-out timetable allows for minimal conflicts to arise with exams and allows students time to prepare themselves while resources are used judiciously. Careful planning and coordination are essential to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders and to ensure a smooth and orderly examination process while following UGC guidelines (University Grants Commission, 1983). Identify the actors and activities classification involved, define the responsibilities of each actor within this process, and develop the Responsibilities Coordination Matrix (RCM) for scheduling the timetable. Each actor has coordination responsibilities for the following activities. Based on the actors, activities, and process, develop the Responsibility Coordination Matrix (RCM) as follows [Table 2]:

Table 2: Scheduling Examination Timetable Related Responsibilities Coordination.

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities						
	EA	F	ITU	Rg	S	MS	SMA
Collect exam schedules from departments	A	R	-	-	-	-	Pe
Coordinate exam dates and time	A	R	-	C	-	-	Pe
Assign exam halls/venues	A	C	-	-	-	R	-
Generate draft timetable	A	C	-	-	-	-	Pe
Display draft TIMETABLE for students	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pe
Handle timetable adjustments (if needed)	A	R	-	C	I	-	Pe
Verify and approve timetable	A	R	-	C	-	-	-
Publish final timetable	A	C	R	I	I	-	Pe
IT system access for schedule management	-	-	A/Pe	-	-	-	-
Notify students and faculty	A	R	-	C	I	-	Pe
Monitor adherence to exam schedule	A	R	-	C	-	-	-

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

The developed actor and activity classification, together with the responsibility coordination ontology for the Scheduling Examination Timetable within the SE system, can be comprehensively documented, and such systematic documentation enhances the ability to monitor and audit the system, thereby improving accuracy and overall process reliability.

Nomination of Paper Setting Related Responsibilities Coordination:

The task of setting question papers is relegated to capable individuals who are typically lecturers who have taught the specific course units. They ensure the questions are aligned with the curriculum and thus accurately represent the learning outcomes and intended competencies of the course. The exercise entails devising questions that test a range of skills, from knowledge to critical thinking and problem-solving

abilities. Great care is taken in making the questions academically sound, simple, and fair so that they are of the standards required and are suitable for different student capabilities. This careful process sustains the validity and applicability of the test. It is the responsibility of the Paper Setter to set examination question papers in line with the curriculum, learning outcomes, and assessment policies of the university. He/she is appointed by the Head of the Department, recommended by the Faculty Board, and approved by the University Senate. Once approved, an appointment letter is issued by the Head of the Department. The Paper Setter should ensure the confidentiality, fairness, and academic integrity of the examination and has to strictly follow university rules and regulations. Each actor is responsible for coordinating the succeeding activities. Based on the actors, activities, and process define the Responsibilities Coordination Matrix (RCM) as follows [Table 3]:

Table 3: Nomination of Paper Setting Related Responsibilities Coordination.

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities					
	HOD	FB	US	PS	ITU	SMA
Nominate Paper Setter	R, A	C	I	-	-	-
Recommend Paper Setter	I	R, A	C	-	-	-
Approve Paper Setter	I	R, A	C	-	-	-
Issue Appointment Letter	I	C	R, A	-	-	Pe
Prepare Examination Paper	I	I	I	R, A	-	-
Ensure Compliance & Confidentiality	I	I	I	R, A	-	Pe
Submit Paper within Deadline	I	I	I	R, A	-	-
Update the IT system	C	-	-	I	R, A, Pe	-

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

This all-inclusive document of the actor and activity classification, along with the responsibility coordination ontology developed for the paper-setting nomination process in the SE system, enhances the transparency, auditability, and overall accuracy of the system.

Nomination of Paper Moderating Related Responsibilities Coordination

The Question Paper Moderator's position is one of the most critical in the university system to assure quality, fairness, and accuracy in examination papers. Moderation of question papers to ensure that they are aligned with the curriculum, university examination rules, and academic integrity is the responsibility of the moderator. The moderator clears questions as adequate, straightforward, and unbiased, re-

moving grammatical, typographical, mark allocation, or factual errors. They also ensure that the marking scheme is integrated, suitably matched to the questions, and fair. Results are confidential, ensuring security at the highest level and maintaining the integrity of assessment. Appointments involve recommendations by Head of the Department, nomination by the Faculty Board, and approval by the University Senate. The Head of Department issues an appointment letter upon approval, and activity updates on moderation activities are coordinated by the IT Unit. Through proper scrutiny and observance of university policy, the Question Paper Moderator ensures that the examination process for students is conducted equitably and uniformly. The Paper Moderator is most likely to be a senior academic. For the activities listed above, all actors have coordination responsibilities. Based on the actors and activities listed above, build the RCM as follows [Table 4].

Table 4: Nomination of Paper Moderating Related Responsibilities Coordination.

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities					
	HOD	FB	US	PM	ITU	SMA
Nominate Paper Moderator	R, A	C	I	-	-	Pe
Recommend Paper Moderator	I	R, A	C	-	-	-
Approve Paper Moderator	I	C	R, A	-	-	-
Issue Appointment Letter	R, A	I	I	-	-	Pe
Review and Moderate Exam Paper	I	I	I	R, A	-	-
Ensure Compliance with Standards	I	I	I	R, A	-	-
Ensure Clarity and Fairness	I	I	I	R, A	-	-
Activity Updates & Record Keeping	I	I	I	I	R, A	Pe

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

The integration of detailed actor and activity classifications with the responsibility coordination ontology for the paper moderator nomination process within the SE system provides a rigorously structured documentation framework, thus improving process transparency, auditability, and operational accuracy.

Scheduling Examination Conducting Related Responsibilities Coordination

Staff scheduling for the conduct of examinations is a prime activity in facilitating the smooth conduct of the examination process. The process involves preparing an exhaustive roster for assigning duties and responsibilities to supervisors, invigilators, and other ancillary personnel. The roster is so constructed as to provide adequate coverage for each examination session, considering such factors as the availabil-

ity of staff, their experience, and their interest, and the nature of the examination arrangement. Systematic scheduling keeps things in line, preventing violations of examination protocols and solving any unforeseen problems effectively. A good roster system contributes much to the maintenance of integrity and the smooth conduct of the examinations. As per UGC guidelines (University Grants Commission, 1983), staff nomination for the supervision of examinations, invigilation, hall planning, vehicle planning, and handling of written papers are some of the very important activities for the conduct of an examination. Staff nominations for each of the stated positions must be done by the faculties to ensure that key duties are assigned only to competent staff. These are scrutinized and approved by the Examinations Department before sending appointment letters to the nominated staff. For the ease of transparency and efficiency in coordination, the IT Unit updates the records on these activities. The structured approach ensures handling of all key aspects of examination

logistics while ensuring accountability of all actors. Each actor has the following coordination responsibilities for activities. Based on the actors and activities developed above, the RCM is as follows [Table 5].

Table 5: Scheduling Examination Conducting Related Responsibilities Coordination.

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities				
	FB	ED	ITU	FR	SMA
Nominate Supervisors & Invigilators	R, A	C	I	-	Pe
Nominate Personnel for Hall Arrangements	R, A	C	I	R, A	-
Nominate Personnel for Vehicle Arrangements	R, A	C	I	R, A	Pe
Nominate Personnel for Written Paper Arrangements	R, A	C	I	R, A	-
Approve Nominations	I	R, A	I	-	-
Issue Appointment Letters	I	R, A	I	-	Pe
Update Activity Records	I	I	R, A	-	Pe
Supervise & Monitor Examinations	I	I	I	R, A	-
Manage Hall Arrangements	I	I	I	R, A	-
Coordinate Vehicle Arrangements	I	I	I	R, A	Pe
Handle Written Paper Arrangements	I	I	I	R, A	-

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Through the integration of actor and activity classifications with the responsibility coordination ontology, the Scheduling Examination Conducting process in the SE system is documented in a more rigorous and traceable manner. This enhanced documentation framework contributes to improved transparency, reinforces audit mechanisms, and ensures higher levels of operational accuracy.

Faculty Board Related Responsibilities Coordination

The Faculty Board plays an instrumental role in the assurance of quality and integrity in the examination process. The

board, comprising academic authorities and faculty members, scrutinizes evaluation procedures, including the list of paper setters and moderators, examination schedules, and the assignment of conducting the staff. All aspects are scrutinized to ensure they are according to institutional regulations and academic standards and UGC guideline. Recommendations by the Faculty Board indicates that the process is in line with the curriculum objectives while being non-discriminatory, fair, and equitable. Such monitoring by the Faculty Board is essential for the validation of the examination framework to meet stakeholders' expectations and those of the institution itself. Finally, such recommendations are sent to the University Senate for approval, and based on the actors and activities, develop the Responsibilities Coordination Matrix (RCM) as follows: [Table 6]

Table 6: Faculty Board Related Responsibilities Coordination

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities							
	FB	D	HOD	E	M	CS	US	SMA
Prepare list of paper setters and moderators	C	A	R	R	C	I	I	Pe
Review/recommend list of paper setters and moderators	R	A	C	C	C	I	I	Pe
Approve examination schedule	R	A	C	I	I	C	I	-
Assign conducting staff	R	A	C	I	I	R	I	Pe
Ensure compliance with institutional regulations and academic standards	R	A	C	I	I	I	I	-
Validate fairness, transparency, and consistency of the examination process	R	A	C	C	C	I	I	-
Submit recommendations for approval	R	A	C	I	I	I	A	Pe
Final approval of recommendations	I	C	I	I	I	I	A	Pe

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

University Senate Board Related Responsibilities Coordination

The evaluation process is sent to the University Senate for final approval by the Faculty Board, which consists of senior academic authorities. Membership of the University Senate includes all professors, deans, and Heads of Departments. This board's endorsement is an important confirmation that examination and assessment procedures have been subject to appropriate academic standards and the attainment of institutional objectives put forth by the university. The Senate

then examines the framework of evaluation, such as how the design of examinations is done, the policy on seniority, and adherence to university statutes. Its approval validates the integrity of the process in ensuring that the process meets the university's goals for education and sustains the quality of academic assessments. It is important because such scrutiny helps to ensure that the credibility and equity of the promoted system of evaluation are observed. The University Senate approves all processes of evaluation, and based on the actors identified and their activities, the following Responsibilities Coordination Matrix (RCM) is developed [Table 7].

Table 7: Senate Board Related Responsibilities Coordination

Key Responsibilities	Coordination of the Responsibilities						
	US	FB	D	HOD	P	RED	SMA
Submit recommendations from Faculty Board for review	I	R	A	C	I	I	Pe
Review evaluation framework (design, policies, compliance)	R	C	C	C	C	C	Pe
Ensure alignment with university academic standards	R	C	C	C	C	I	-
Validate seniority policies in examination and assessment	R	C	C	C	C	I	-
Ensure compliance with university regulations	R	C	C	C	C	C	-
Approve final recommendations of Faculty Board	A	C	I	I	I	I	-
Uphold credibility, fairness, and transparency of the evaluation system	R	C	C	C	C	I	-
Communicate final approval to relevant authorities	R	I	I	I	I	A	-

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Paper Setting /Moderating Execution Related Responsibilities Coordination

The paper setter, having prepared the initial draft of the question paper, proceeds in a systematic manner for quality control. This is followed by moderation before submission to the Examination Department. It involves an examination by the moderator, who goes through the paper very meticulously for its clarity, consistency, and correspondence with the prescribed curriculum or academic standards for the examination. The aim is to make the questions justifiable, easy to understand, and challenging enough. Then, after moderation, the paper is forwarded to the paper setter for proofreading. This is to spot and correct any errors in grammar,

typesetting, mark allocation, or formatting. It also provides an opportunity to proofread twice for content correctness, so nothing unintended or inconsistent is included in the paper. Once proofreading and revision of any mistakes are completed, the final question paper is sent back to the Examination Department. The paper is then ready to proceed to the printing and packaging stages. This laborious exercise, involving multiple stages of scrutiny and refinement, ensures that the question paper is at the desired academic standard, free of any errors, and prepared to be distributed among students in an open and professional way. Every actor has coordination responsibilities for the subsequent activities. Based on the actors and activities, develop the Responsibility Coordination Matrix (RCM) below [Table 8].

Table 8: Paper Setting /Moderating Execution Related Responsibilities Coordination.

Key Responsibilities (activity classification)	Coordination of the Responsibilities					
	PS	M	EB	HOD	FA	SMA
Draft Initial Question Paper	R	I	I	A	C	-
Submit Paper to Examination Department	R	I	A	C	I	-
Moderation of Paper	I	R	C	C	I	-
Review for Clarity, Consistency, and Alignment	I	R	C	C	I	-
Return Paper to Paper Setter after Moderation	I	R	I	A	I	-
Proofreading of Paper	R	I	C	A	I	-
Final Revisions and Editing	R	I	A	I	I	-
Submit Final Paper to Examination Department	R	I	A	I	I	Pe
Prepare Paper for Printing & Packaging	I	I	R	I	A	Pe

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

After developing the activity classification framework and Responsibility Coordination Matrix, discussions were held with domain experts (Examination Registrar, Subject Management Assistant, Dean of the Faculty, and Head of the Department) to evaluate the completeness and correctness of the proposed framework. The results showed a satisfactory level of agreement with the framework.

Research Limitations

This study was conducted as a pilot investigation, concentrating on the development of an Ontological Framework for the Responsibility Coordination Matrix (OFRCM) within the Pre-Student Evaluation Phase (SPEP). In addition to this core contribution, two supplementary ontological frameworks were conceptually formulated: one for the Student Evaluation Execution Phase (SEEP) and another for the Post-Student Evaluation Phase (PSEP). Although these latter frameworks were not explored in detail here, they offer significant potential for further research development. The results also show that such a theoretical framework can form the basis for the design and implementation of an IT-based solution

to assist and accelerate the process of student evaluation across universities.

CONCLUSION

The current article offers an Ontological Framework for Responsibility Coordination that has been proposed and tested for the important gap in the management of the student evaluation process in Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutions. The inherent inconsistencies and tacit assumptions of responsibility regarding the assessment and accountability procedures in the existing manual systems led to the amalgamation of a methodological approach in this research that combined the principles of Design Science Research Methodology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

The proposed framework incorporates the modelling of actors, activities, and responsibility relationships in the Pre-Student Evaluation Phase through the integration of ontology engineering techniques with responsibility assignment approaches like the RACI responsibility assignment matrix, as well as business governance principles in the Business Motivation Model (BMM). The empirical validation exercise

with the involvement of domain experts demonstrated the effectiveness of the proposed framework in providing a comprehensive, cohesive, and relevant representation of responsibility coordination, which is largely absent in the current, manually performed responsibility assignment process.

Theoretically, this study further applied the usage of ontologies not only to knowledge representation but to the governance of responsibility within higher education institutions. In a more practical sense, this research has a structured background related to the development of IT-enabled student evaluation systems.

Though it is a valuable contribution, it has also opened several research avenues. First, as the current study only considered the Pre-Student Evaluation Phase in the ontological framework, the framework needs to be expanded to cover the whole procedure, including the other two phases - the Student Evaluation Execution Phase and the Post-Student Evaluation Phase. Second, because the framework has been validated by performing a case study at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, a different study needs to be conducted in the future to validate the generality of the framework at several different universities. Finally, because the study has opened an avenue to implement an effective IT-based student evaluation system by using the proposed ontological framework, several different studies should be conducted in the future to explore how the usability and acceptability of the system and its resistance to digitization influence organizational efficiency.

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Finally, special gratitude is extended to all participants who were willing to take part in this study. Their valuable insights are highly appreciated, as they significantly enhanced the rigor, relevance, and applicability of this proposed framework.

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The Impact of the Current Economic Crisis on the Quality of Secondary Education in Sri Lanka with Special Reference to Monaragala District

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Abstract

In terms of education quality, school education plays a significant role, and under this, the senior secondary student category is a unique turning point that creates skilled human resources for the near future. Both internal and external economic shocks directly disrupt the smooth functioning of quality education in any economy; in line with this, the negative impact of the economic crisis creates a tragedy in the quality of education. This study's objective is to determine the effect of the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka on the quality of senior secondary education during the worst economic crisis in the economic history of independent Sri Lanka. For this study, 396 senior secondary students and 792 of their parents were randomly selected from 21 government schools under three school types in the Monaragala district, and data were collected through structured questionnaires via telephonic interviews. Factor analysis was employed to construct the dependent variable-education quality-while ordinary least squares linear multiple regression analysis was utilised to assess the impact of economic crisis on education quality. Factor analysis revealed that both reliability, consistency and validity are statistically significant with higher responsiveness, and there is a significant influence on the education quality of the model. In the regression analysis, the three proxies indicating the economic crises of the country are increasing household income generation time of parents, students attending household income generation, and students' annual private education cost. In alignment with this, key analysis revealed that increasing the household income generation time of parents and students attending household income generation has created a considerable negative impact on education quality. But during the economic crisis, students' annual private education costs have created very minimal positive effects on education quality. Aside from that, during the economic crisis, parents with a poor monthly income have been actively involved in secondary jobs. Moreover, during the crisis period, 254 Ordinary Level students had scored less than 55 in science, mathematics, and English subjects, while 48 Advanced Level students failed at least one subject. Under the policy recommendations, the social safety net should be systematic, ensure the teaching and learning basics, and have continuous research and development processes for school regulation and facilitation in order to ensure consistency in quality education during a crisis.

Keywords: Economic Crisis, Education Cost, Education Quality, Secondary Jobs, Senior Secondary Education

INTRODUCTION

"People learn from birth to death; hence it is said that 'learning' is a life-long journey." (Alawattagama, 2020, p. 2). Any stage of education enables high socioeconomic mobility and can be identified as the easiest path to eradicating poverty and inequality in any economy. The quality of education that is nurtured with knowledge, skills, and good attitudes plays a unique role in maintaining the sustainable economic process of any economy in the world. "The only way to have economic growth, in the long run, is to improve the quality of schools" (Hanushek, 2020, p. 25). Within the framework of schooling, overall senior secondary education (*school education is from grades 10 to 13*) has become a prominent global milestone because it is an educational transition stage, and students in that age group are more likely to be

away from education and high tendency to join the labour market. Maintaining uniformity in the quality of senior secondary education is an extremely important factor, especially for any developing and developed economy. Because the students who receive senior secondary education in any economy of the world will help to create a unique human capital in that economy in the next 10 years. This idea is also associated with the National Education Commission (2022) and Epstein et al. (2002).

However, the Sri Lankan economy, which is facing the worst economic crisis since its independence (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022) has a big challenge to maintain the stability of the quality of senior secondary education. According to

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Dundar et al. (2017) and, Ambusaidi and Yang (2019), this has become a prominent incident during periods of economic crisis, and that has a negative or positive effect on the quality of education. According to Shafiq (2010); Ferreira and Schady (2008), these negative impacts are more powerful and lead to a decline in national educational outcomes during an economic crisis.

Sri Lanka's current economic crisis has also been burning like sparks under the ashes for a long period because of the many weak and inconsistent economic policies that have been taken during the 75 years since the post-independence era (Fernando, 2022). Fortunately, or unfortunately, the Easter attack, the weak policy suggestions that have been taken, the limitation of economic activities after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the dark aspect of the economic crisis that has been hidden for a long time have converted the current Sri Lankan economy into a severe economic recession (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022). In line with the above explanation, Sri Lanka is also facing the problem of a negative economic growth rate that continues to rise. There was an unprecedented decline in economic growth between the 4th quarter of 2021 to the 4th quarter of 2022, as -5.8%, 2%, -1.6%, -8.4%, -11.8% and -12.4% respectively. More notably, the allocation of GDP to education remains at a lower level in Sri Lanka from 2016 to 2022, at 3.23%, 2.6%, 1.6%, 1.5%, and 1.2%, respectively (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023). In this context, according to LIRNEasia, (2023) 7 million of the total population (2 million families) of Sri Lanka live below the poverty line. Especially since a high percentage of school students (97%) in Sri Lanka receive their education through free public education (National Education Commission, 2022), the current severe government financial instability is practically more possible to threaten the quality of their education (Fernando, 2022). But there is no sufficient evidence to uncover whether the sudden degradation of the economy might be impacting senior secondary education quality in the current circumstances or not.

Consequently, this study attempts to identify the effect of the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka on the quality of senior secondary education. Furthermore, under the specific objectives, this study attempts to identify the impact of three main indicators on the quality of senior secondary education during the crisis period. These are students' engagement in household income-generating activities, parents' (either the father or the mother) spending more time in household income generation, and annual private expenditure on education (private tuition, essential learning aids, transport) during the crisis period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Both the Theoretical and Empirical literatures were reviewed under this section. Any person in the world has the right to seek quality education, and the more an economy expands access to quality education to its community, the faster economic development of that economy can be promoted (Carron & Chau, 1996). This idea is also supported by Mbole Nkong et al. (2016) and Shafiq (2010). "Throughout history, education has reflected the ideals of society, and it is viewed as the engine that drives social and economic prosperity" (Mbole Nkong et al., 2016).

According to UNICEF and the National Educational Policy Framework (NEPF) in Sri Lanka 2020-2030, "A quality education is defined by five elements: the learner's outside experiences, learning environment, content of education, learning processes, and education outcomes. Learners must be healthy, well-nourished and supported by their families and communities. The learning environment should be safe, healthy and stimulating. Appropriate education content is relevant to the learner and presented in a well-managed classroom. Learning outcomes should promote participation in society" (Agnihotri, 2017, p. 4878).

Quality education is fundamentally driven by two basic principles. The 1st principle asserts that the main objective of the overall education system should be the development of social, intellectual, mental, physical, and cognitive factors of all students without concern for their nationality, gender, socio-economic status, and geographical location. The 2nd principle emphasises that quality education should create responsible citizens with good attitudes and creative thinking skills (Agnihotri, 2017). "Quality determines how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social, and developmental benefits" (Agnihotri, 2017, p. 4879). The students' physical and mental health plays an important role in continued engagement in school (McCain & Mustard, 1999), and the continued focus on the school curriculum and continued engagement in school affect students' achievement levels and the development of education quality (Madani, 2019). Carron and Chau (1996) argued that the low level of physical and mental nutritional status of children limits their access to quality education, and this idea is also supported by Rasheed et al. (2000), who argued that "physically and psychosocially healthy children learn well" (p.5). Factors such as the sufficient salary of teachers (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006), the nature of teacher education and education policy, teacher qualifications and teaching practices, nature of teacher motivation and school attendance, professional qualifications, the sufficiency of school infrastructure, availability of textbooks and learning materials, the number of students under the teacher, mastery of teacher knowledge, whether a teacher uses traditional or modern teaching methods, efficient use of school time, continued involvement in student activities in the classroom are affecting to transfer of quality education from the teacher to the student (Rasheed et al., 2000).

"According to the neoclassical framework, crises are exogenous phenomena arising from inadequate expectations in relation to the economic fundamentals" (Nemiña, 2015). According to John Maynard Keynes's business cycle theory, there are two primary causes of an economic crisis, namely, the marginal efficiency of capital and effective demand deficit. The collapse of this marginal efficiency of capital can be identified as the cause of many of the world's financial crises, including the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s (Ge & Liu, 2010). The financial crisis can be identified as the worst economic impact that results from situations such as the large-scale balance of payments problems, the collapse of foreign assets, external financial supply or credit-related constraints, internal or external shocks, and macroeconomic imbalances (Claessens & Kose, 2013). A sudden economic downturn caused by a financial crisis can be identified as an economic crisis, and collapses in many macroeconomic var-

iables can occur during this timeline (e.g., negative economic growth rates, rising unemployment, and high inflation) (Perera, 2016). *“Economic crises result in deterioration in the labour market, increased unemployment rates, pay cuts, poor working and living conditions, and difficulties in obtaining essential items, all of which could lead to increased stress and psychological problems”* (Rohanachandra, 2022, p. 338).

The empirical literature basically aims to identify how economic crisis affects education quality. When any economy in the world is faced with a severe economic recession, the impact spreads to every small economic unit of that economy and can affect various outcomes at the household level, including poverty, unemployment, household health, prosperity, and schooling (Duryea et al., 2007). Some prior studies provide evidence of null or positive effects of economic crisis on education quality. Such positive effects are mostly created in richer developed economies (Ferreira & Schady, 2008). *“When an economic crisis impacts the education sector negatively, the overall development of a nation worsens, leading to illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, restlessness among youth, etc”* (Gunawaradana & Karunarathna, 2022 p.277). According to previous studies, the determinants affecting the education quality in an economic crisis have led to the following hypotheses.

“When children enjoy a pleasant learning environment, they are likely to attend school with a lot of passion, thus allowing them to complete the schooling with great achievement” (Mbole Nkong et al., 2016, p. 38). In line with this idea, for the quality of education, it is important to have wider access to quality curricula, better teachers who handle those curricula, and a facility system that facilitates teaching and learning support materials. The availability of sufficient school equipment, textbooks, sanitation facilities, classroom spaces, other learning aids, and timely maintenance etc., is positively associated with the quality of education (Rasheed et al., 2000; Tety, 2016). Consequently, sufficient information provided by previous studies leads to the following hypothesis.

H1: There is a significant relationship between annual private expenditure on education and the quality of senior secondary education of school children.

Parental involvement can be identified as a mirror of a child's educational quality, and prior studies have confirmed that if parents are involved, children are more likely to continue their focus on education. A study conducted in 12 Latin American countries has found that high levels of parental involvement are essential for children's quality education (Wilms, 2002). The “Epstein model” can be identified as a model that explains this parental relationship perfectly. Through this model, the parental intervention that can occur in children's education can be recognised in the *“six-level framework that includes: parenting, learning at home, communicating with the school, volunteering at school, decision-*

making in the school, and collaborating with the community” (Barnard, 2004; Epstein et al., 2002 p. 41). Evidence has confirmed that when parents monitor their children's home studies, encourage participation in extracurricular activities, and make the parent-teacher relationship more active, it affects children's end-of-year progress and increases student achievement (Boro & Alidou, 2015). Consequently, sufficient information provided by previous studies leads to the following hypothesis.

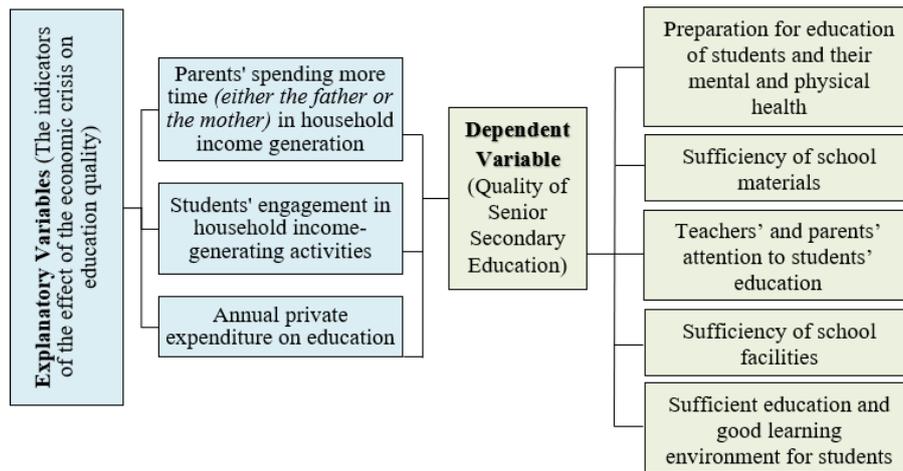
H2: There is a significant relationship between Parents' spending more time on household income generation and the quality of senior secondary education of school children.

“Sensing weaker labour market prospects from a decline in school quality, parents may withdraw their child from school or become less supportive of their child's educational endeavours” (Shafiq, 2010, p. 6). As elderly students, this would be harmful to senior secondary students, perhaps compelling them to terminate their school journey. Confirming that, (Rohanachandra, 2022) highlights that declining household income has generated *“Spillover Effects”* on mental and physical health, the supply of adequate learning materials, and the declining learning period of the secondary students. During the Indonesian economic crisis in 1997, 2% of school students supported their parents in income-generating activities of the households by declining their school attendance (Thomas, et al., 2004). Moreover, the economic crisis in Brazil has led to a rise in child labour among individuals aged 10 to 16, due to the unexpected short-term unemployment of the head of the household (Duryea et al., 2007). Confirming that, Mugumya et al. (2022) highlight that the unexpected short-term unemployment of parents puts pressure on the mental structure of the students, and they argue that *“There may be pressure for children and youth to help augment family incomes, resulting in more school absences or higher dropout rates”* (p. 7). Consequently, sufficient information provided by previous studies leads to the following hypothesis.

H3: There is a significant relationship between students' engagement in household income-generating activities and the quality of senior secondary education of school children

Thus, the ample information provided by prior studies leads to the identification of the factors, specifically, Preparation for education of teachers and students and their mental and physical health, sufficiency of school materials and facilities, teachers' and parents' attention to students' education, good learning environment for students, which covers quality education. Consequently, this study is conducted to identify whether there may be an effect on the quality of education under the current Sri Lankan economic crisis. Hence, much aligning with previous empirical studies, the conceptual framework, which is explained via Figure 1, has been created for identifying the impact of the current economic crisis on the quality of senior secondary education

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Developed by Author, 2023.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research philosophy for this study could be identified as positivism, and the research approach can be identified as the deductive approach. To identify the effect of economic crisis on educational quality, the majority of research studies, such as those by Bamigboye et al. (2016) and Eleni et al. (2014), have employed the quantitative method as their research method. As well as most of the research studies have employed, namely, Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011), Barnard (2004), and Mugumya et al. (2022), primary data to analyse the impact of the economic crisis on education quality. Following the above structure, this study also used the quantitative approach and primary data for analysis.

According to LIRNEasia (2023) Uva province showed the current highest poverty headcount ratio (48%) in Sri Lanka. Also, Uva province is the highest food-insecure province in 2022 than other provinces in Sri Lanka. (World Food Programme, 2022). As well, Nambissan (2010) highlights that the pressure of the economic crisis is sharply felt on the most impoverished households in any economy, which is deeply impactful on their educational expenses. In line with the above backdrops, this study is covered in Monaragala District as the study area, which showed a 21% poverty headcount ratio and a 3.3% poverty contribution ratio (Department of Census and Statistics, 2022). The 21 government schools of Monaragala Education Zone were selected under cluster sampling to cover all three secondary school

types (1AB, 1C, and Type 2) to represent all four Educational Zones in Monaragala District.

Most of the previous studies, such as those by Bamigboye et al. (2016) and Eleni et al. (2014), have employed three types of units of analysis, namely, teachers, students, and their parents as research studies. Simple random sampling has been used in lots of studies, such as those by Eleni et al. (2014) and Mugumya et al. (2022), as the sampling technique. In line with this, a total of 396 students and 792 of their parents were selected by simple random sampling as the effective sample through the "Krejcie and Morgan Table" method from the current population in the Zone.

Data collection was done through structured questionnaires via telephonic interviews with students, their parents, and teachers, based on previous studies such as Dabo (2015). The questionnaire comprises three sections: five-point Likert Scale questions ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (Bamigboye et al., 2016), employed to assess educational quality via dimension reduction under factor analysis (Mugumya, et al., 2022), alongside structured and MCQ questions, are utilised mostly to identify the value of four proxies of economic crises. Table 1 clearly illustrates this concept. The dependent variable, Education Quality, has been measured under the factor analysis technique through dimension reduction (Mugumya, et al., 2022) The regression analysis has been done through the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis to identify the impact of the economic crisis on educational quality

Table 1: Operationalization of the Variables.

Measurement Variable	Dimensions	Items	Measurement	References
Explanatory Variables	Annual private expenditure on education	Cost for essential education supportive things Tuition Classes Transport Cost	Interval Scale	(Okongo, et al., 2015) (Heyneman, 1990) (Nambissan, 2010)
	Parents spending more time (either the father or the mother) in household income generation		Nominal Scale – Dummy Variable	(Neppl, et al., 2016) (Rohanachandra, 2022)
	Students' engagement in household income-generating activities		Nominal Scale – Dummy Variable	(Rohanachandra, 2022) (Shafiq, 2010)

Measurement Variable	Dimensions	Items	Measurement	References		
Dependent Variable – Education Quality	Preparation for the education of teachers and students, and their mental and physical health	School Attendance	Five-Point Likert Scale	(Rasheed et al., 2000)		
		Engagement with supportive education		(Ambusaidi & Yang, 2019)		
		Usage of modern teaching and learning techniques		(Thomas, et al., 2004)		
		Using school time effectively		(Mugumya, et al., 2022)		
		Completion of the school syllabus				
		Encouraging students in their studies and extra-curricular activities				
		Evaluation of students' accomplishments				
		Taking healthy foods continuously for the main three meals				
		Spending school time in happiness				
		Dependent Variable – Education Quality (For Both Models)		Sufficiency of school teaching and learning materials and facilities	Sufficiency of school textbooks, extra reading materials and teaching guides	Five-Point Likert Scale
Sufficient materials for online education	(Okongo et al., 2015)					
Adequacy of notebooks, writing materials, and other required practical materials	(Tety, 2016)					
Teachers' and parents' attention to students' education	Parents', teachers', and students' communication		Five-Point Likert Scale		(Mugumya, et al., 2022)	
	Engaging in students' study activities and allocating time for their education at home				(Neppl, et al., 2016)	
	Encouraging for education				(Epstein, et al., 2002)	
	Supplying academic materials for their convenience				(Rasheed, et al., 2000)	
	Parental involvement in the parents' meetings and specific functions of the school				(Nurhakim, et al., 2021)	
	Teachers' involvement in students' activities during school hours					
	Developing students' attitudes					

Source: Developed by the Author, 2023.

The researcher has done final data analysis under the two approaches, namely, descriptive statistical analysis and Causal Research Design (OLS multiple linear regression), which have been done in previous studies, such as those have Animba and Edeh (2021), Mugumya et al. (2022), and Mbole Nkong et al. (2016). Finally, the researcher has conducted key Assumption tests, reliability, consistency and validity tests, coefficient significance tests (*T-tests*), Coefficient of Determination (R^2), and overall significance tests (*Analysis of Variance, ANOVA*), and hypothesis tests for OLS linear regression under the 95% significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, some of the demographic data have been gathered to identify the demographic spread of the sample. Table 2 illustrates that more than 50% of surveyed students are female students, and most of them are ordinary-level senior secondary students. The most probable reason was that the majority of science and math stream advanced-level students did not attend school normally to study.

Table 2: Demographic Data of Senior Secondary Students.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	55.56%
	Male	44.44%
School Category	1AB	32.32%

	1C	181	45.7%
	Type 2	87	22.13%
Education Stage	Ordinary Level	240	60.6%
	Advanced Level	156	39.4%

Source: Survey data, 2023.

According to Table 3, when we consider the demographic data of parents in Monaragala District, the majority of them

had Ordinary Level and Advanced Level education or below. Moreover, Table 3 shows that the majority of the parents of senior secondary students in Monaragala District are working in the agriculture sector and the service sector today.

Table 3: Demographic Data of Parents of the Students.

Variable		Frequency		Percentage	
		Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Education Level	No Schooling	8	2	2.07%	0.51%
	Grade 1-5	40	17	10.38%	4.34%
	Grade 5-9	77	46	20%	11.76%
	Ordinary Level	149	176	38.7%	45.01%
	Advanced Level	86	109	22.33%	27.87%
	Diploma	7	13	1.81%	3.32%
	Technical/ Vocational	9	3	2.33%	0.76%
	National College Education	3	9	0.77%	2.3%
	Graduated	6	13	1.55%	3.32%
	Post Graduate or Upper	-	3	-	0.76%
Job Sector	Agriculture	216	153	57.75%	53.49%
	Industrial	38	18	10.16%	6.29%
	Service	120	115	32.08%	40.2%

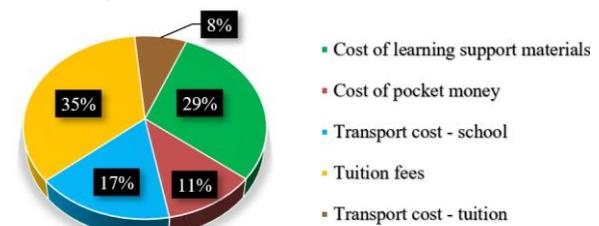
Source: Survey Data, 2023.

The research investigated how the special factors related to the quality of senior secondary education identified through the literature review are present in the Monaragala district during the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka. In the face of the pressure of the economic crisis, parental unemployment, real income fall, books, education cost increase, and transportation cost increase and this affects the educational results and mental pressure of students (Ananat et al., 2011; Heyneman, 1990). In line with this, during the 2008 global financial crisis, student achievement in subjects such as Mathematics and English dropped sharply in America's schools (Shores & Steinberg, 2017). Parallel to this, among the grade 10 and 11 students who faced the last term examination and represented the sample in Monaragala district, based on the 2022 final term test marks, 39% (254 of students) of the students have shown a score level of less than 55 for mathematics, science and English subjects and 11% (71 of students) of the students have shown a score level of less than 35 for these subjects. Also 30% (48 of students) of Advanced Level students have failed the exam according to the 2022 last term test marks.

During the 2008 global financial crisis, low-income Indian parents resorted to some solutions, such as non-payment of tuition fees and withdrawing their children from tuition classes to face rising household costs (Nambissan, 2010). In line with this, 52% (125 of students) of the sample representative senior secondary students in Monaragala district have

dropped out of at least one of the subjects they received tuition education due to their inability to afford the cost based on their household income. Also, during the economic crisis period, 18% (43 of students) and 16% (39 of students) of the students represented in the sample of Monaragala district have dropped at least one tuition subject due to the increase in tuition fees and the increase in transportation costs, respectively. Due to the impact of the economic crisis in Indonesia in 1997, school textbooks, photocopying fees, tuition fees, and school transport fees have risen sharply (Thomas, et al., 2004). In parallel with this idea, considering the categories of monthly general education expenditure for a senior secondary student during the crisis period (Figure 2) in Monaragala district, the expenditures such as tuition, learning support materials, and transport show a remarkably high monthly average

Figure 2: Monthly Average Education Cost of a Senior Secondary Student in 2023.



Source: Survey Data, 2023.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics.

Descriptive Items	Dependent Variable	Independent variables		
	Quality of senior secondary education	Students' engagement in household income-generation activities	Annual private expenditure on education	Parents spending more time (<i>either the father or the mother</i>) in household income generation
Mean	0.0908	0.3263	104692.7	0.7474
SD	0.7782	0.4694	69348.76	0.4351
JB Test (P value)	0.1093			

Source: Survey Data, 2023.

According to the descriptive statistics shown in Table 4, in Monaragala district, the annual average education cost of one representative senior secondary student during the crisis period from February 2022 to January 2023 is LKR 104,692.70, and that is underscoring the substantial financial burden shouldered by households in supporting secondary education. The Standard Deviation of annual private expenditure on education is Rs. 69,348.78/-, and it means that, during that period, the annual education expenditure of the majority of the sample representative senior secondary students has spread mostly within the upper and lower limits of Rs. 69,348.76/- from the mean value. During the economic crisis, the average of being a senior secondary student involved in household income generation is 0.3263, implying that approximately 32.6% of students are involved in such activities. Also, during the economic crisis, the average of being a parent who is spending more time in household income generation is 0.7474, indicating that in nearly 75% of

the surveyed households, either the father or the mother dedicates more time to household income-generating activities. This suggests that a significant percentage of students and parents allocate their time between education and income generation during the economic crisis period, which may have implications for the academic performance of the students. Table 4 is utilised to clearly illustrate the above ideas. According to Table 4, the Jarque Bera (JB test), the normal distribution test confirms that both models have a normal distribution under the 95% significance level.

When measuring quality education, the researcher utilised the following dimension reduction approach (Table 6) using the values that are given by respondents of the five-point Likert scale. This approach is also supported by Bamigboye et al. (2016), Thomas et al., (2004), and Mugumya et al. (2022).

Table 6: The Approach of Measuring the Dependent Variable.

Dimensions	Five-Point Likert Scale					Calculations	
Mental & physical health	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly Agree	Method of Dimension Reduction	Single Value for Education Quality
Preparation for education							
Sufficiency of school materials							
Teachers' attention to students							
Parents' attention to students	1	2	3	4	5		

Source: Developed by the Author, 2023.

When considering the items discussed under the conceptual framework, the quality of senior secondary education (*Dependent Variable*) under the model of senior secondary students, the Indicator Reliability of all items was statistically significant under the 95% significance level. Also, the Consistency and Validity under Cronbach's Alpha statistical test

and KMO and Bartlett's test, respectively, were equal or higher than 0.6, which means that the model of senior secondary students has the best consistency and Validity. Table 7 is utilised to clearly illustrate the above ideas.

Table 7: Reliability and Validity of Dependent Variable - Education Quality.

Items	Indicator Reliability		Consistency	Validity
	component	P Value	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO and Bartlett's
Mental & physical health	0.77	0.0000	0.838	0.824
Preparation for education	0.79	0.0000		
Sufficiency of school materials	0.77	0.0000		
Teachers' attention to students	0.841	0.0000		
Parents' attention to students	0.724	0.0000		

Source: Survey Data, 2023.

Table 8: Reliability and Validity of Independent Variables - Proxies of Economic Crisis.

Proxies of Economic Crisis	Indicator Reliability		Validity
	component	P Value	KMO and Bartlett's
Annual private expenditure on education during the crisis period	0.614	0.0000	0.61
Parents (<i>either the father or the mother</i>) spending more time on household income generation	0.615	0.0000	
Students' engagement in household income-generating activities	0.615	0.0000	

Source: Survey Data, 2023.

When considering the items discussed under the conceptual framework, the three proxies of the economic crisis (*Independent Variable*) under the model of senior secondary students, the Indicator Reliability of all items was statistically significant under the 95% significance level. As well, the validity of these three proxies under the KMO and Bartlett's test was equal to or higher than 0.6, which means that this model, which represents the economic crisis in education, has the best consistency and validity. Table 8 is utilised to clearly illustrate the above ideas.

According to the multiple regression analysis model results, which are revealed in Table 9, all coefficients with the intercept term are statistically significant under the 95% significance level (P value < 0.05). Maintaining the quality of education without affecting its economic process has become an extremely important factor for any economy in the world to maintain a fast and stable economic development process (Mbole Nkong et al., 2016). But some negative and positive impacts on the education quality can be identified under the above explanation. Table 9 is utilised to clearly illustrate the above ideas.

In keeping with Table 9, during the current economic crisis, the quality of senior secondary education increases by

0.00000196 when the annual private cost of education is changed by one unit (Shores & Steinberg, 2017). Sirait, (2016) asserted that the essential education supportive things and sufficient learning materials (*test books, exercise books, and writing materials, etc.*) largely impact the attainment of educational quality; but in the Sri Lankan context, this is somewhat obscured by the prevailing culture of excessive inflation. According to (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022), the 2022-2023 average annual national inflation rate for Sri Lanka was around 45%, which has generated a negative impact on the real benefit of the education expenses as well. A somewhat parallel idea to this idea can be identified in the Study Okongo et al., (2015), and during a period of economic crisis, the costs of learning support materials, transportation, and tuition education increase rapidly, which directly affects the education quality of students. According to the Nambissan, (2010) study, due to the economic crisis in India in 2008, many parents from poor or low-income families removed their children from tuition classes, severely cutting their education expenses, and thus had a sharp negative impact on the education quality. Although the Sri Lankan story is a little bit different, due to very little positive impact most likely to be negative in the near future due to this worse inflation.

Table 9: Multiple Regression Model: Impact of Economic Crisis on Quality of Secondary Education.

Variables	Coefficient Value	T value	0.05	P value
Intercept	0.3162	3.2619	0.05	0.0012
Annual private expenditure on education	1.96E-06	-4.7055	0.05	0.0000
Parents' (either the father or the mother) spending more time in household income generation.	-0.402	3.2619	0.05	0.0012
Students' engagement in household income-generating activities	-0.3904	3.6087	0.05	0.0003

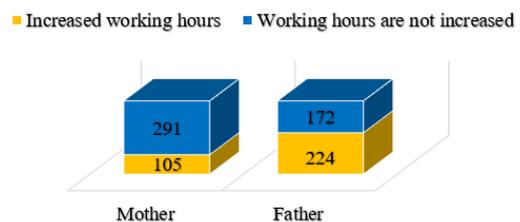
Source: Survey Data, 2023.

In keeping with Table 9, during the current economic crisis, relative to a senior secondary student who is not involved in the generation of household income and a parent (*either the father or the mother*) who is not involved in the household income generation for a longer period, being a parent who is involved in the income generation for a longer period in time will reduce the quality of senior secondary education by 0.402. As a parallel to this idea, during an economic crisis, many households fall into poverty, thereby increasing the number of parents in their daily working hours. Accordingly, parent-child communication is weak, and it negatively affects the children's education quality (Neppl et al., 2016). Due to the high inflation during the economic crisis, the stress on the parents may be increasing, which might have contributed to their longer working hours. These findings are also confirmed by Shafiq, (2010) and Eleni et al., (2014). In line with this, as a result of the 1998 Asian financial crisis, parents in low-income Indonesian families have tended to increase their working hours during the economic crisis (Thomas, et al., 2004).

According to Figure 3, considering the sample of Monaragala district in Sri Lanka, there is a significant number of parents (A percentage of 41.5% of total parents) who have increased their working hours due to the economic crisis. In the analysis of the sample data, the majority of fathers are interested in increasing working time than mothers in the Monaragala district, and many parents have focused on increasing work-

ing time to more than 2 hours per day during the crisis period. Not only that, 21% (168 of parents) of the parents represented in the sample of Monaragala district have been involved in new secondary jobs to increase household income during the crisis period. As identified through telephonic interviews conducted during data collection, lots of parents in Monaragala district were engaged in secondary jobs in that period, such as farming, hired work, latex collection, garment industry, small businesses, small industries (*such as brick, besom, and broom making*), and small self-employment (*mushroom cultivation, coconut shell products*). Parallel to the above students' job involvement, 85% (396 of parents) of the parents who increased their working time or joined new jobs in the sample of Monaragala district during the current economic crisis were identified as the group whose monthly family income is less than Rs. 50,000/-.

Figure 3: Parents who Increased Working Hours During the Economic Crisis.

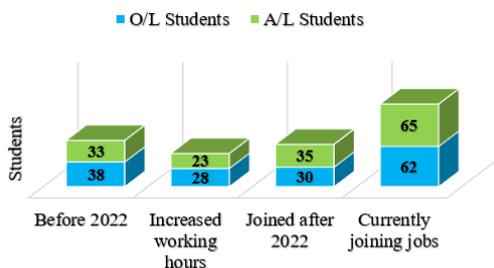


Source: Survey Data, 2023.

In keeping with Table 9, during the current economic crisis, relative to a senior secondary student who is not involved in

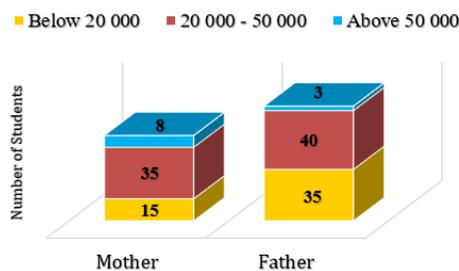
the generation of household income and a parent who is not involved in the household income generation for a longer period, being a senior secondary student involved in household income generation reduces the quality of senior secondary education by 0.3904. In times of economic crisis, there is a rapid decline in household income, which puts a lot of pressure on older school children (Eleni et al., 2014). So that especially senior secondary students often resort to helping their parents' jobs or taking up new jobs of their own preference, which has a negative impact on the quality of education (Rohanachandra, 2022; Shafiq, 2010). In times of economic crisis, there is a rapid decline in household income, which puts a lot of pressure on older school children (Eleni et al., 2014). A study conducted during the Argentine and Tanzanian economic crisis shows that the family's income level and the education level of the parents are also other reasons for this (Nihan & Rosati, 2009). Parallel to that, 83% (96 of students) of the students who increased the working time or joined new jobs in the sample of Monaragala district during the current economic crisis were identified as the group whose monthly family income is less than Rs. 50,000/-. According to the labour data of the student sample shown in Figure 4, 51% (65 of students) of senior secondary students currently involved in family income-generating activities are those who joined new jobs after the economic crisis. In line with this idea, a considerable number of senior secondary students in Monaragala District have utilised their school time for income generation initiatives amid the economic crisis to boost their household income capacity. Figure 4 supports this notion, revealing that 32% (127 of students) of senior secondary students are now employed, and most of them are utilising their school time for income generation. According to Shores and Steinberg, (2017), many surveys conducted after the 2008 global financial crisis have explained that during an economic crisis, students who used their schooling time to work suffered a long-term decline due to missing out on quality education. This idea is also supported by Shafiq, (2010) and Rohanachandra, (2022); who discovered that the students who are engaged with household income generation activities during crisis periods have to face negative impacts on their educational achievements.

Figure 4: Senior Secondary Students who are Involved in Household Income Generation.



Source: Survey Data, 2023.

Figure 5: Parents Engaged in Secondary Jobs Relative to Their Monthly Earnings.

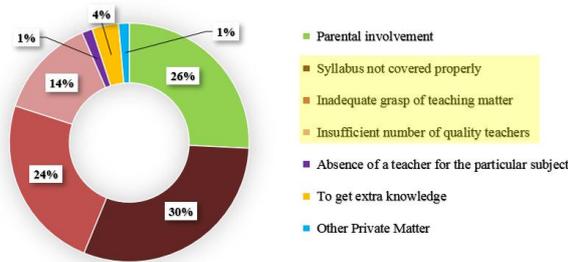


Source1: Survey Data, 2023.

Figure 5 reveals that 55% of students whose parents engage in secondary jobs fall within the monthly family income range of LKR 20,000 to LKR 50,000. Confirming that idea, according to (Department of Census and Statistics, 2022), the "Poorest 40% families earn only Rs 26,931, not enough even to put 3 meals on their table at current prices". Consequently, this study points out that more than 37% of students whose parents engage in secondary jobs do not reach a sufficient monthly income level to cover their educational expenses due to their monthly family income level lying below LKR 20,000. Besides that, the parents who are at a low-income level tend to be involved in secondary jobs, which has a negative impact on students' quality of education. This view was supported by Shafiq (2010) and Mugumya et al. (2022); they emphasised that these considerable secondary job involvements of parents with poor monthly incomes generated substantial pressure on the quality of education background of their children.

"Teachers are at the heart of quality education" (Agnihotri, 2017, p. 4878). Improving the quality of teaching is a fundamental element in improving the quality of schooling. If so, all school teachers who contribute to the work of teaching in the school system are a major determinant of the quality of education and have an important impact on student outcomes in both academic and non-academic aspects (Nurhikim et al., 2021). Aligned with those findings, this study is also focused on illustrating why secondary students are going to supplementary education centres, utilising Figure 6. Figure 6 illustrates that 68% of senior secondary students responded that they are involved in supplementary education due to the weakness of the school teachers (*inadequate grasp of teaching matter and insufficient number of quality teachers*) and the inadequate instructional quality (*syllabus not covered properly*) of the government schools. Consequently, these circumstances are compelling secondary students or their parents to seek external educational support under a payment mechanism, which will generate external education costs for students, even though we have a free education system.

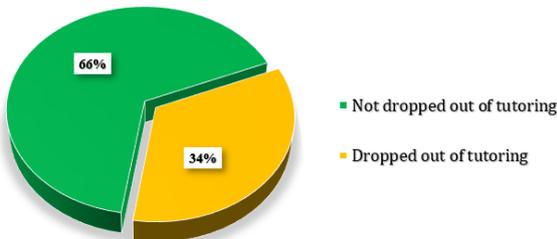
Figure 6: Determinants of Secondary Students' Engagement in Supplementary Education.



Source: Survey Data, 2023.

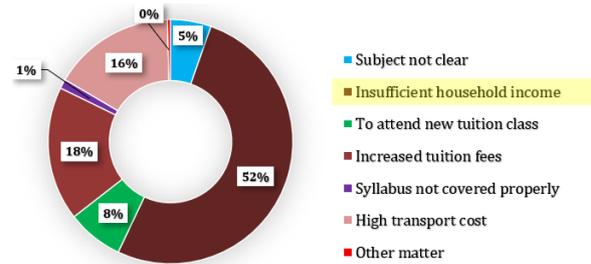
This is also supported by Bamigboye et al., (2016), who highlight that, during the bad economic circumstances, some teachers are unnecessarily rude to students and have not taken the time to provide adequate explanations of any concepts being taught. In here, during the economic crisis, Bamigboye et al., (2016) argued that lots of poor households cut their children's education expenses to support other essential household needs. During the current economic crisis here, this study is also aligned with this idea; Figure 7 argues that 34% of students have dropped out of the tuition classes. Significantly, the main reason for leaving tuition education was the insufficiency of household income during the economic crisis. Figure 8 confirms that 52% of students who dropped out of tutoring did so due to insufficient household income. This idea is also supported by (Barakat et al., 2010), who argued that during the period of the economy not performing well, parents tended to remove their children from supplementary education due to insufficient household income

Figure 7: Patterns of tuition dropout among secondary students.



Source: Survey Data, 2023.

Figure 8: Causes of tuition dropout among secondary students.



Source: Survey Data, 2023.

Based on the results of this study, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of all explanatory variables is very close to 1, and the value of Tolerance is upper than 0.7, which means there is no multi-collinearity among all variables. When considering the specification bias of the model, the probability value of Ramsey's Reset Test was 0.00039, and it was 95% statistically significant, which means there is no specification bias in this model. When it comes to the heteroscedasticity of the disturbance term of the model, the researcher utilised the 'Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey Test' and 'White's General Heteroscedasticity Test.' According to Figure 9, both values (*F Value*) of the above tests are not statistically significant under the 95% probability level (*Probability Value > 0.05*), which illustrates that there is no heteroscedasticity for the disturbance term in this model.

Table 10: Heteroscedasticity Test.

Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey Test		White's General Heteroscedasticity Test	
F Value	Probability	F Value	Probability
0.9711	0.3265	0.9711	0.3265

Source: Developed by the Author, 2023.

Moreover, the value of R^2 is 0.18, which means 18% of the presence of quality of senior secondary education is described by all independent variables. Finally, the F value test of ANOVA for multiple regression analysis of senior secondary students, which is mentioned under Table 11, demonstrates that the regression model accounts for a statistically significant percentage of the variation in the dependent variable. The explained sum of squares ($ESS = 41.563$) relative to the total sum of squares ($TSS = 229.4912$) yields an F-statistic of 27.72 with 3 and 376 degrees of freedom (df). The corresponding p-value ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) strongly rejects the null hypothesis of no model effect, confirming that the explanatory variables collectively exert a significant influence on the education quality during the economic crisis.

Table 11: ANOVA Test – Students' Model.

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Sum of Squares	F Value	P Value
ESS	41.563	3	13.8543	27.72	0.0000
RSS	187.9281	376	0.4998	-	-
TSS	229.4912	379	0.6055	-	-

Source: Survey Data, 2023.

CONCLUSION

Education quality is the invisible hand that guides an economy towards rapid, sustainable development of the nation.

In pursuit of education quality, school education plays a pivotal role in creating fruitful, knowledge-based human resources to face the real economic challenges, especially in a

developing country. Consequently, this study aims to identify the impact of the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka on the quality of senior secondary education. In keeping with this objective, Uva Province–Monaragala District, which showed higher poverty in Sri Lanka among the poverty indicators and even showed the highest food insecurity in Sri Lanka in 2023, was selected as the study area. Accordingly, 396 senior secondary students and 792 of their parents were selected from 21 government schools as study units under simple random sampling. The factor analysis, which is for the determination of education quality, and the ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis, which is for the determination of the impact of the economic crisis on education quality, have been employed for data analysis.

According to this study, the researcher has identified a significant negative impact on the quality of senior secondary education from parents spending more time on household income generation and students' engagement in household income-generating activities. And there is relatively little positive impact on the quality of senior secondary education from annual private expenditure on education. All these results have been statistically significant under the 95% percent significance level. Also, the family income level has a significant impact on the parents being involved in the household income generation for a longer period of time, and the students being involved in the household income generation in the crisis period, which was found as a special finding through the study. Besides that, this study confirmed that parental and school teacher involvement in the educational activities of senior secondary students is one of the key requirements for their quality lifelong journey in the future. Significantly, evidence supported by the study shows that the majority of senior secondary students tend to be involved in supplementary education due to poor performance of the school teachers (*inadequate grasp of teaching matter and insufficient number of quality teachers*) and weak institutional management of government schools (*syllabus not covered properly*) in Sri Lanka. Consequently, during the crisis period, more than 50% of students who were involved in supplementary education have left tuition classes due to a lack of sufficient household income. As well, this study was also completely aligned with the ideas of previous studies, which investigated the decline of school attendance that has been seen throughout the crisis period. Moreover, considering the 2022 final term test results, the senior secondary age group students represented by the sample in the Monaragala district have obtained poor test scores, and some of them have failed the exams.

Thus, it can be finally concluded that the majority of the sensitive factors that target the quality of senior secondary education in an economic crisis identified in the literature can be identified in Sri Lanka. As well as the decline in the quality of senior secondary education today, probably creates a painful second impact on the economy in the coming period. Based on the above backdrops, immediate policy requirements are essential to address these negative impacts on education quality in order to safeguard the sustainable long-term economic journey in a quality manner.

Finally, in order to reduce the pressure of the impact of the economic crisis, some policy recommendations have been introduced by the researcher, namely (1) One of the most valuable implementations is to facilitate 13-year compulsory

school education, especially for senior secondary students. For that kind of policy implementation, the government needs to initiate a proper identification method to strategically identify the students who are from poor family backgrounds. The study argued that the students who are from low-income families are significantly involved in income-generation activities during the economic crisis. Aligned with that, during the crisis period, the average monthly education expenditure of a senior secondary student was LKR 9000, and due to that, the social security network should be implemented systematically (*at least partially*) to cover low-income families. Furthermore, the government might launch awareness campaigns to make low-educated parents aware of the worth of higher education instead of involving their children in income-generating activities. (2) Moreover, make school life popular among senior secondary students (*mostly among A/L students*) with creative learning activities to get a complete outcome from the government-free education system. (3) More than 50% of senior secondary students are involved with supplementary education due to the poor performance of government teachers. Accordingly, teachers should be trained in creative teaching styles, thinking patterns, and good attitudes to maintain the uniformity of the quality of school education. (4) Besides that, providing sufficient necessary school facilities and teaching and learning materials on time for teachers and students all over the country in school premises. (5) Continuous and efficient regulation of schools and all educational centres (*especially private higher education institutions*) should cover the entire island as soon as possible. In line with these, urgent policies should be put in place to prevent the rise of child labour, strengthen their independent education framework and accelerate research and development in the education sector covering the whole country.

However, this study contains some limitations that open the way for new scholars to carry out further studies. There may be more than four determinants of the quality of education during an economic crisis, and future researchers can focus on them. Finally, there is a scope for future researchers to carry out this study with a wider interpretation to cover all 25 districts of Sri Lanka. Moreover, there is a scope for future researchers to conduct research covering the fields of early childhood, primary, junior secondary, and higher university education.

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An Analysis of English Support Courses and Institutional Structural Arrangements of English Language Teaching Staff in English Medium Instruction: Evidence from Three State Universities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

English support courses at universities are crucial to the academic development of undergraduates in English Medium Instruction (EMI). Similarly, the roles/ institutional structural arrangements of English Language Teaching (ELT) staff who serve in EMI for undergraduates' academic development. Despite the expansion of EMI in Sri Lankan state universities, there is limited empirical understanding of how English support courses are structured and how the roles of ELT staff are institutionally configured across faculties. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the nature of English support courses and the institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff within EMI, drawing on data from nine faculties at three state universities in Sri Lanka. This study employed qualitative research design, drew on purposively sampled lecturer interviews (n = 40) and official, published materials, and analyzed them using qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that, of the nine faculties, English support for EMI programs is delivered through centralized Departments of English Language Teaching in six of them. Of the nine, three faculties offer faculty-/department-specific English support courses and have faculty-based structural arrangements of ELT staff for EMI. Also, this study reveals an emerging role for ELT staff as academic development practitioners in EMI, in addition to their expected role as ELT lecturers/instructors, which may require greater collaboration. Consequently, the study demonstrates that the effectiveness of English support courses in EMI is not inherent to the courses themselves but is shaped by how ELT roles are institutionally configured within faculties.

Keywords: Collaborations, English Language Support Courses, English Medium Instruction (EMI), Institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff, Sri Lankan Higher Education (SLHE)

INTRODUCTION

The growing institutionalization of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education has transformed the academic context in non-English-speaking countries, positioning English as the primary instructional language in an increasing number of degree programs. In Sri Lanka, where state universities have adopted EMI across a range of disciplines, this shift has brought both opportunities and challenges.

Navaz (2021) points out that although English was initially the medium of instruction in Sri Lankan higher education, post-independence education policies, particularly the introduction of free education and the promotion of mother tongue instruction at the secondary level, significantly reshaped language practices in universities. From the 1960s onwards, mother tongue instruction was introduced in Arts and related disciplines, while English continued to dominate in science, medicine, engineering, and other science-related

fields (Navaz, 2021). In recent decades, alongside policy discourses that frame English proficiency in terms of global competitiveness and graduate employability (University Grant Commission, 2019), EMI has gained prominence in Sri Lankan state universities.

Dhanapala 2021 explains that concerns over undergraduates' English proficiency, particularly in relation to English medium academic study and graduate employability, led the University Grants Commission to establish English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) and English Language Teaching Centres (ELTCs) in 1983. These units were created to provide institutionalized English language support for undergraduates and were later strengthened by upgrading ELTUs and ELTCs to Departments of English Language Teaching (DELTs) in 2016, to enhance the quality and governance of English language provision in Sri Lankan universities.

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Theoretically, this study contributes to EMI by foregrounding English support courses and the institutional structure of ELT staff as mediating factors in academic development. Practically, the study offers evidence-based insights for universities and policymakers seeking to design more coherent and context-sensitive English support mechanisms within EMI, particularly in multilingual, postcolonial higher education contexts such as Sri Lanka.

Despite the expansion of EMI in Sri Lankan state universities, there is limited empirical understanding of how English support courses are structured and how ELT staff roles are institutionally configured. Central among these is the question of how best to structure English support courses and the institutional structural arrangements for English Language Teaching (ELT) staff to effectively scaffold students' disciplinary learning in EMI. Specifically, it explores how English support is conceptualized, positioned, and delivered across faculties, including the status of such courses (credit-bearing or non-credit), their curricular alignment with disciplinary programs, and the organizational location and roles assigned to ELT staff. In addition, the study investigates how both content lecturers and ELT staff perceive and experience collaboration within EMI contexts, with particular attention to the extent, forms, and effectiveness of cross-disciplinary interaction. By bringing together structural, curricular, and perceptual dimensions, the study seeks to illuminate how institutional arrangements shape collaborative practices and the provision of academic language support in EMI settings.

Research indicates that institutional structural arrangements, such as whether English support is offered as optional or credit-bearing (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017), embedded or stand-alone (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), or centrally coordinated or faculty-based (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017), directly shape student outcomes, lecturer collaboration, and the overall sustainability of EMI. However, despite the global growth of EMI, there is limited empirical evidence on how these structural decisions operate in specific contexts, such as Sri Lanka's state universities, where linguistic diversity, resource constraints, and policy imperatives intersect at multiple levels. This study, therefore, examines English support courses and the institutional structural arrangements for ELT staff in Sri Lanka's EMI higher education context to identify practices that enhance academic development in EMI, raising the following research question:

How can English support courses and institutional structural arrangements for ELT staff be best designed to effectively scaffold students' disciplinary learning in EMI contexts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature

This study is grounded in five corresponding approaches that explain how English support courses and institutional structural arrangements impact the academic development of students in EMI. First, an academic literacies perspective views literacy as a social, discipline-specific practice rather than a general skill (Gee, 2008), suggesting that language support is most effective when integrated into courses and genres within the field (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2015). Second, constructive alignment and assessment validity em-

phasize the importance of aligning Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), teaching and learning, and assessments to prevent language from causing construct-irrelevant variance or inequity (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Third, language policy and management in higher education, particularly the "ROAD-MAPPING" view of English Medium Education (EME) - English Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS) as a network of roles, agents, products, processes, assessment, and management (Dafouz & Smit, 2023, p.1), which will be helpful to discuss how institutional structural arrangements position ELT departments/units/centres and influence their capacity for change. Fourth, communities of practice and boundary-spanning collaboration (Wenger, 1998) facilitate the description of how ELT specialists and content lecturers together develop curricula, materials, and feedback processes when organizations establish collaborative roles and shared routines. Finally, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach of scaffolding and classroom interactional competence explains how trained staff design support mechanisms that facilitate content learning through language, utilizing students' full repertoires (Coyle et al., 2010). Collectively, these perspectives suggest that the delivery of courses and the role of ELT staff will significantly influence both disciplinary mastery and language development (academic literacy) in EMI.

Empirical Literature

The Status of English Support Courses in EMI

An analysis of the literature reveals a range of English support courses in EMI, including embedded versus discrete/stand-alone courses, credit-bearing versus optional courses, and centralized versus decentralized courses. These terms or phrases require careful definition, as they are often context-specific and carry subtle nuances. Frequently, this diversity appears to be influenced by various factors, such as the operationalization of English support courses within the degree, the institutional arrangements of ELT lecturers/instructors, and their academic correlation with content lecturers. This section provides a concise outline of the selected interventions, based on the literature outlined below for this study.

Embedded Versus Discrete/Stand-Alone Courses

Embedded English support strategies integrate mediating language development directly within disciplinary curricula and assessments in EMI. This approach aligns linguistic instruction with mainstream academic practices and learning outcomes, providing more effective support for students' learning and participation (Wingate, 2015). On the other hand, discrete or stand-alone English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are usually organized as separate support mechanisms that run alongside students' disciplinary programs, delivered by specialist language lecturers/instructors with limited integration into subject teaching or assessments (Wingate, 2015). Some research extends from social approaches to academic literacy indicates that such generic, stand-alone support often does not effectively help transfer academic literacy skills to disciplinary tasks because literacy practices are discipline-specific and not applicable across contexts (Hyland, 2002; Wingate, 2018).

Credit-Bearing and/or Compulsory Versus Optional Courses

Credit-bearing and/or compulsory English support courses are often required as part of a degree program. Credit-bearing and/or compulsory English support courses often ensure participation, structured improvement, and assessment. In contrast, optional English support courses, which are often elective/ non-credit courses, are based on voluntary workshops, flexible, and student-centered, sometimes as self-study online courses. These courses may result in low student uptake and uneven benefits, particularly because students who most need support are least likely to self-select into voluntary language courses (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017).

Centralized Versus Decentralized Courses

Centralized English support courses are managed by a central language unit/English language teaching centre or department that operates institution-wide through English language teaching specialists (Murray, 2016). These English support courses are designed to meet students' language needs for English language development (Pantelich, 2021), although they are less tailored to specific disciplines (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). On the other hand, in some higher education contexts, discipline-specific departments or faculties run their own English support courses. Content lecturers and language lecturers/instructors are expected to collaborate in these courses for better outcomes (Jacobs, 2015). Although these courses are sometimes led by language lecturers/instructors, the curriculum is often focused on and influenced by the faculty or department's specific needs. Hence, these decentralized courses are discipline-specific and responsive to the needs of students in particular faculties or departments.

In Sri Lanka's state university system, English support is mainly provided through English Language Teaching Departments/Units (DELTs/ELTUs) as separate, stand-alone programs. These are often mandatory and sometimes carry academic credits, such as courses in English for Academic/ Specific or Professional Purposes offered alongside degree studies (University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Science, ELTU webpage, 2025; University of Sri Jayewardenepura, DELT webpage, 2025). Policy at the system level supports this approach by mandating a common undergraduate curriculum and a university-wide English proficiency test, University Test of English Language (UTEL), that students must pass before graduation (UGC Establishment Circular, 2019, p. 1). Some faculties incorporate English support more deeply into their discipline-specific contexts, with faculty-based ELTUs explicitly helping students transition to EMI academic programs, including faculty-specific initiatives tailored to particular degrees (Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Faculty of Applied Sciences, ELTU webpage, 2025; University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Science, ELTU webpage, 2025). In practice, universities adopt a mixed approach, combining centrally managed English courses through ELTUs (either credit or non-credit, and compulsory) with varying levels of integration into faculty curricula, especially where EMI needs are significant

ELT Staffing in EMI

Raune (2003) discusses the role of language centres in higher education and their future challenges. This study points out different "designations of language centres such

as "language institute, language unit, language teaching centre, institution of foreign language study, language services, language laboratory and many others..." and further moving into formal terms such as "department or institute" (Raune, 2003). Also, there are core functions of the language centre staff or agreed consensus, such as, "practical language training especially for learners not specialising in languages, the use of appropriate technology for language learning," and "research and development in the field of language teaching and learning" (Raune, 2003, p.3). Critchley et al. (2025) also view one primary function of ELT staff in universities as encouraging a research-oriented culture.

However, it is worthwhile to analyze the role of ELT staff in the present SLHE context, where EMI is in increasing demand. As defined by Raune (2003), ELT staff are expected to develop undergraduates' English-language proficiency across diverse disciplinary contexts. So do the SLHE. Still, this study attempts to emphasize an additional role 'assigned' to them due to the introduction of EMI. Therefore, the ELT staff is currently being urged to take on a collaborative academic development practitioner role in the EMI (Galloway & Rose, 2021), to develop mediating English across disciplines, and to support content staff with Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This transition from ELT practitioner to EMI practitioner, and often a back-and-forth between the two roles, can be challenging for the SLHE ELT staff due to limited and controlled human resources within the system.

Further, beyond centralized language teaching, Wingate and Hakim (2022) points out that discipline-specific academic literacy embedded in programs may improve alignment between content learning and language demands, thereby making EAP staff central collaborators. Further, Malmström and Zhou (2025) highlight the importance of collaboration between language and subject lecturers in EMI for better academic outcomes, and Jacobs (2015) also discusses "discursive spaces" between them for improved collaboration.

Another framework will provide a more structured classification for English support courses in EMI based on two major philosophies: autonomous and ideological. It may also provide insights into the English support courses and the roles/institutional structural arrangements of ELT staffing in EMI. The autonomous model of literacy, as viewed by Lea and Street (2006) within the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS), is seen as neutral and technical, a skill that is free from its immediate social and cultural contexts. In contrast, the ideological understanding of academic literacy encompasses a broad social perspective. This philosophy does not view the two significant aspects of EMI: the subject knowledge and the mediating language, as two separate components (McKenna, 2004), so that there is no over-demand for the mediating language proficiency or discrete English courses (ESL or EAP/ESP) for academic development in EMI.

Placing these two major theoretical understandings: autonomous and ideological in the background, this section discusses the three models: study skills, academic socialization, and academic literacies configured by Lea and Street (2006). Often, the study skills model and the academic socialization model are influenced by autonomous understanding, while the ideological understanding influences the academic literacies model. According to Lea and Street (2006), these three models have overlapping features.

The Study Skills Model

According to Lea and Street (2006), the study-skills model treats writing and literacy as individual, cognitive skills, emphasizing surface features and assuming students can transfer these skills across contexts. Instruction is mainly remedial and decontextualized from the mainstream curriculum, e.g., college composition, remedial classes, and ESL/EFL courses aimed at correcting language inaccuracies. McKenna's (2004) EMI Curriculum Cycle-1 (ESL) mirrors this study-skills approach.

Academic Socialization Model

The academic socialization model views literacy as a process of induction into disciplinary communities (Lea & Street, 2006), where students learn to emulate the ways of speaking, writing, and thinking characteristic of each field, thereby helping them meet the demands of university-level education. In practice (EAP in McKenna's Curriculum Cycle 2), it orients learners to subject-specific genres. Critics argue that it presumes a homogeneous, stable academy and undertheorizes institutional practices and power, implying that students can reproduce disciplinary discourse unproblematically once taught.

Academic Literacies Model

The academic literacies model adopts a broad, critical perspective on literacy, foregrounding meaning-making, identity, power, and how institutions define legitimate knowledge. Unlike academic socialization, it views learning academic literacy as a complex, dynamic, and situated process that involves epistemological issues and social relations, including power dynamics and shifting social identities (Lea & Street, 2006).

Accordingly, the three main practices of the English support programs in EMI may be kept within the academic literacies' framework by Lea and Street (2006). English as a Second Language (ESL)/General English practice reflects the features of the study skills model, while EAP/ ESP reflects the features of the academic socialization model. Mainstreaming academic literacy is considered best practice for developing it, reflecting the features of the academic literacies model (Jacobs, 2015; McKenna, 2004). McKenna (2004) considers it under the third curriculum cycle. This third model also expects to develop English within the discipline in an integrated manner through the disciplinary curriculum (McKenna, 2004) and the pedagogy (Jacobs, 2015) in EMI. Furthermore, the following continuum illustrates the relationship between these English support courses and the Sri Lankan education system, spanning from primary education to higher education.

Figure 1: The Spread of Three Models and English Support Courses of EMI in a Continuum.



study skills model / academic socialization model / academic literacies model

source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Further, these English support courses in EMI will also help understand the role of ELT staff and their institutional structural arrangements in EMI. Given the nature of the courses, ESL/General English or EAP/ESP courses are language-based and are therefore often taught by the ELT staff. On the other hand, academic literacy courses may be taught by the ELT staff, the faculty academic staff, or a collaboration between both. The following table summarizes the features of three interventions.

Table 1 - The Summary Table for Interventions in the EMI.

Intervention	Intervention 1	Intervention 2	Intervention 3
Philosophical understanding of AL	Autonomous	Autonomous	Ideological
Theoretical model configured by Lea & Street (2006)	Study skills	Academic Socialization	Academic literacies
Curriculum model configured by McKenna (2004)	Curriculum cycle 1	Curriculum cycle 2	Curriculum cycle 3
Type of English support courses in the EMI	ESL/ General English	EAP/ESP	Mainstreaming Academic literacy
Nature of practice	Discrete	Discrete	Mainstreamed
Collaboration	No/less collaboration	No/less collaboration	collaborative
Main objective	Four language skills (Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking)/ and grammar and vocabulary development	Inducting students into a set of Academic English norms	Mainstreaming academic literacy development practices into the curriculum and pedagogy
Implementation	Through language lecturers/instructors	Through language lecturers/instructors	Collaborations between language lecturers/ instructors and subject lecturers/ or Trained (may be CLIL) subject lecturers or trained (may be CLIL) language lecturers/instructors

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative design, appropriate for exploring institutional practices, meanings, and experiences surrounding EMI and ELT support in higher education contexts (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative approaches are well-suited to examining how policies and support structures are interpreted and enacted within specific institutional settings, enabling in-depth, context-sensitive analysis (Tisdell et al., 2025).

The research context comprised three state universities selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is widely recommended in qualitative research when cases are intentionally selected for their relevance and potential to yield information-rich data in relation to the research questions (Patton, 2015; Tisdell et al., 2025). In this study, the universities were selected to ensure variation in English support provision across state universities and to capture diverse institutional and structural arrangements of ELT staff working within EMI settings, thereby enhancing analytical depth and comparative insight. Two universities (labelled university 1 and university 2) were located in the Western Province, while the third (university 3) was a pioneering regional university, enabling the study to account for both urban and regional higher education contexts.

Data were generated through interviews, a well-established qualitative research method for eliciting participants' perspectives, professional experiences, and interpretations of institutional practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews are particularly effective for investigating complex educational phenomena such as EMI and academic support structures, where participants' lived experiences and reflective accounts are central to understanding institutional realities (Seidman, 2006). Across the selected universities, nine faculties offering undergraduate programs in management, science, and arts (including social sciences, humanities, and languages) were included. For analytical clarity, these faculties are hereafter referred to as management, science, and arts.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted through official, published higher education documentation and interviews with lecturers.

Official Documentation

Data were collected from official documentation, including prospectuses (2019) and (2020), Department curricula of selected universities, the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework

(SLQF), subject benchmark statements (UGC), and University Test of English Language (UTEL) benchmarks, to examine the nature of English support courses offered in EMI and the roles and institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff.

Interviews

Lecturers were selected for interviews based on their experience teaching in higher education, using a purposive sampling strategy. Interviews were conducted with 40 lecturers (13 female and 27 male) from three faculties (social sciences/humanities, management, and applied sciences). In all cases, the interviews were relatively short and were followed by informal conversations about issues that arose in the study.

Of these forty, nineteen interviews were with academics holding administrative roles at universities, namely deans of faculties or heads of departments. Ten deans who had completed their doctoral studies (including five who were professors) were interviewed, and all were experts across various disciplines. Next, nine department heads were interviewed. All of them were senior lecturers, and six had completed their doctorates at the time of the interview. These nine department heads were also specialists in their respective fields. Semi-structured questions were used as prompts for both deans and heads. The questions focused on various administrative issues affecting the EMI, particularly the design of English support courses and the allocation of ELT staff.

Regarding the distinction between subject and language lecturers, 37 of the 40 participants were subject experts. All of them were senior lecturers, with fourteen holding PhDs and the remaining having master's degrees. Three language experts with master's degrees were interviewed, but none had earned doctoral degrees. The disciplinary experts were asked about the teaching-learning process in their classes in terms of EMI, and about the contribution of English support courses and ELT staff to EMI in undergraduates' academic development. The language experts were interviewed about their teaching experience in English support courses and their role in EMI.

All interviews were conducted in English (though code-switching was present), except for two, which were entirely in Sinhala. In the latter case, the researcher translated the interviews into English.

The summary of the demographic information of the academics is given below:

Table 2: Summary of the Demographic Information of the Academics.

Site	Faculty	No. of Academics	Age range	Gender	Masters/PhDs	Experience
University-1	FMSC ¹ /	13	34-61 years	8-M	11 PhDs	4-29 years
	FAS ² /			5-F	2 Masters	
	FHSS ³					
University-2	FCMS ⁴ / FS ⁵ /	14	37-66 years	9-M	11 PhDs	13-40 years
	FSS ⁶ / FH ⁷			5-F	3 Masters	
University-3	FMS ⁸ / FAS ² / FSSL ⁹	13	35-55 years	10-M	8 PhDs	6-25 years
				3-F	5 Masters	

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

¹FMSC – Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce

² FAS – Faculty of Applied Sciences

³FHSS - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

⁴FCMS - Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies

⁵FS - Faculty of Science

⁶FSS - Faculty of Social Sciences

⁷FH – Faculty of Humanities

⁸FMS – Faculty of Management Studies

⁹ FSSL – Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages

Data Analysis

Data collected through lecturer interviews were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to identify themes.

In this approach, the literature-based summary table of English support courses and other dimensions identified in the EMI empirical literature was also utilized. The manual coding process was used for analysis and one example was provided below for further clarification.

Table 3 - A Table to Display an Example of The Manual Coding Process.

Transcript	Implication/Latent view	Theme
<i>No...not actually academic lecturers cannot do...cannot take such type of responsibility within this limited time. ---Not actually all the subject teachers even we, even myself I don't know how to correct grammatical mistakes</i>	Subject lecturers are already given much responsibility due to the teaching and learning process, so that they are not in a position to take up another added responsibility like developing undergraduates' English language proficiency, as they are not aware of grammar rules in order to teach them to students.	Preference for English instruction delivered by language specialists Perceived constraints of subject lecturers in supporting undergraduates' English language development Discrete, language-expert-led English support courses

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As outlined earlier, this section addresses the research objectives by examining the nature of English support courses and the institutional and structural arrangements of ELT staff within EMI across three selected state universities in Sri Lanka, drawing on data obtained from official institutional documents and semi-structured interviews.

A brief introduction to EMI in three universities

The three selected universities offer English-medium degree programs. In particular, both the management and science

faculties offer all their degree programs entirely in English medium. The faculties of arts offer their degree programs selectively in English, often when they teach a particular subject matter in English. Therefore, the English-medium degree programs selected for this study in three faculties conduct all stages of learning in English, including lectures/tutorials, assessments, and thesis writing/VIVA.

This section first provides details on the English support courses, and then on the roles and institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff.

English support courses

Table 4 - The Summary Table of English Support Courses in Three Selected Universities.

Uni.	Faculty	Status	Course name	Credits
1	FMSC ¹	Core	BCC 1340 Business Communication I	Credited (3)
		Core	BCC 1341 Business Communication II	Credited (3)
		Core	ACC 2241 Professional Communication and Academic Writing	Credited (2)
		Non-Credit	BEC 2001 English for Business Economics Part I	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 2002 English for Business Economics Part II	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 3001 English for Business Economics Part III	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 3002 English for Business Economics Part IV	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Non-Credit	BEC 4001 Academic Writing p.53-59	Non-Credit (Pass/Fail)
		Core	BCC 2240 Business Communication III	Credited (2)
		Optional	BCC C001 2nd, 3rd & 4th Years: Semester I Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional
		Optional	ACC 2340 Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional
		Core	BCC 2340 Business Communication III	Credited (3)
		Optional	BCC C001 Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional
		Optional	BCC C001 Certificate in Professional Communication	Optional

	On demand for any dept.	BCU 2nd, 3rd & 4th Years: Semester II Department/Program Certificate in Academic Writing	Certificate
FAS ²	Compulsory	ENG 101 2.0 English for Scientific Communication	Compulsory
	Compulsory	(Semester -1) ENG 101 2.0 English for Scientific Communication	Compulsory
	Compulsory	(Semester -2) DELT 1101.3 English in Use	Credited (3)
	Compulsory	DELT 1201.3 Pathways in English	Credited (3)
2	FCMS ⁴	Core DELT 21532 Advanced English for Commerce and Management Studies	Credited (2)
	Core	DELT 31522 English for Commerce and Management Professionals	Credited (2)
	FAS ⁵	Compulsory DELT 11222 English for Biology	Credited but not counted for GPA
	Compulsory	DELT 22232 English for Communication and Further Studies	Credited but not counted for GPA
	Compulsory	DELT 12262 English for Physical Science	Credited but not counted for GPA
	Compulsory	DELT 12262 English for Physical Science	Credited but not counted for GPA
	Compulsory	DELT 11242 English for Environmental Science	Compulsory
	Compulsory	DELT 11232 English for Professionals	Compulsory
	Compulsory	DELT 12282 Communication Skills for Professionals	Compulsory
	Compulsory	DELT 11232 English for Professionals	Compulsory
	Compulsory	DELT 12282 Communication Skills for Professionals	Compulsory
	² FSS ⁶ FH ⁷	Compulsory ELTU Compulsory English Courses (Compulsory
3	FMS ⁸	Core FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 1163 Business English -I	Credited (3)
	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 1263 Business English-II	Credited (3)
	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 2163 Business Communication -I	Credited (3)
	Core	FM/BI/MM/BM/TM/HM/EBM 2263 Business Communication -II	Credited (3)
	FAS ²	Compulsory Professional English 1	Compulsory
	Compulsory	Professional English 2	Compulsory
	Compulsory	Professional English 3	Compulsory
	Compulsory	Professional English 4	Compulsory
	FSSL ⁹	Compulsory CELL 111 English Language Level-1	Credited (3)
	Compulsory	CELL 121 English Language Level-2	Credited (3)
	Compulsory	CELL 211 English Language Level-3	Credited (2)
	Compulsory	CELL 221 English Language Level-4	Credited (2)

Source: Developed by the Author Using Faculty Prospectuses- 2019/2020.

¹FMSC –Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce

² FAS – Faculty of Applied Sciences

² There were two separate faculties, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities, in university 2, but they are considered in this study under one category: arts.

³FHSS - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

⁴FCMS - Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies

⁵FS - Faculty of Science

⁶FSS - Faculty of Social Sciences

⁷FH – Faculty of Humanities

⁸FS – Faculty of Management Studies

⁹FSSL – Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages

Across three universities and nine faculties, English support courses reflect standard and unique features.

Standard Features of English Support Courses

All faculties offer English support courses either in the first or second academic year, demonstrating their commitment to supporting students in EMI at the early stages of the degree programs. Except in a few cases (3) at university 1 (management) and university 3 (management and science), the remaining six faculties seek English support courses offered by the DELTs of the relevant university. All three faculties of university 2 obtain English support courses from the university DELT. Those courses range from general to academic/specific, ensuring that a range of undergraduate proficiency levels is supported. Also, such courses range from educational to professional, thus preparing undergraduates for future industrial communication.

When these standard features are analyzed through the academic literacies framework, it is clear that the nature of English support courses ranges from the study skills model to the academic socialization model (General English/EAP/ESP courses) taught by ELT experts. In terms of the teaching learning process, there is no close collaboration between the subject lecturers and the language experts during the delivery of lessons and assessments, so the language experts alone teach the courses and conduct assessments. Constructive alignment is evident at the faculty level through the provision of General English, EAP, and ESP courses, however, at the macro level, a misalignment is apparent between faculty expectations of EMI, namely, full disciplinary mastery through English, and the nature of the English support offered, due to the absence of academic literacy courses that engage students deeply in discipline-specific meaning making beyond generic or skills-based language instruction.

It shows that DELTs at these three universities have a strong capacity to provide English support courses to meet the needs of various disciplines in EMI across multiple faculties, thereby assuring the centralized system for the operationalization of English support courses. Therefore, it is clear that all faculty programs in arts and science (except the science faculty in university 3) in this study align with the centralized English support courses.

The Unique Features of English Support Courses

English support courses offered across nine faculties at three universities have unique features. Some faculties at three universities offered credited English courses as core subjects, which were often discipline-specific. This feature is unique to all three management faculties but not to the other faculties in this study. However, these course contents cannot be identified as academic literacy course content embedded in the core, but rather as ESP course content, which is highly aligned with the core disciplines. The credits

offered for the English courses at the management faculty at university 3, are counted for the final GPA, and across all three universities, the total number of management faculty credits ranges from 4 to 12. This heavy weightage given to English support courses is noteworthy, as it reflects the faculty's commitment to upgrading EMI standards. Also, the management faculties of university 2 and 3 offered only core courses, while the management faculty of university 1 offered a combination of core, non-credit, optional, and on-demand courses. Further, these courses of all three management faculties were mainly EAP and ESP courses, which can be categorized under the academic socialization model that runs parallel to mainstream courses. Such courses fell under the purview of faculty academics, and they catered to faculty-specific EMI needs with the help of language lecturers/instructors. Some courses were highly contextualized into their own disciplines, such as English for Business Economics and English for Commerce and Management professionals, reflecting the discipline-specific EMI demands.

Science faculty courses of all three universities range from academic (university 1 – scientific communication) to professional (university 3 – Professional English). Furthermore, discipline-specific English courses (university 2- English for physical sciences/ English for biology), which fall under the academic socialization model, are also offered in science faculties, serving both faculty- and department-specific demands.

All faculties of arts offer English support courses, often focusing on industry-oriented English communication and serving a wide variety of English language and EMI needs. However, the arts faculty of university 3 stands out by offering credited and compulsory English support courses delivered by the university DELT. This approach emphasizes the faculty's intense need to enhance EMI standards.

The unique features of English support courses in the faculties reflect further important aspects, such as clear differentiation by discipline and institutional priority. At university 3, English support courses are offered for 12 credits and count directly toward the final GPA. From a constructive alignment perspective, this heavy credit allocation signals a strong institutional recognition of English as integral to disciplinary success in EMI rather than as a peripheral skill. Across all three universities, management faculties stand out for offering English courses, often with substantial credit weightings of 4-12 credits, and, in the case of the management faculty at university 3, for contributing credits directly to the final GPA. From a constructive alignment perspective, this heavy credit allocation signals a strong institutional recognition of English as integral to disciplinary success in EMI rather than as a peripheral skill. Viewed through the academic socialization model, discipline-specific English courses, often offered in management and science faculties, demonstrate stronger alignment with disciplinary conventions than General English courses, which respond to both faculty- and department-level EMI needs. However, EAP/ESP courses still remain largely discrete, suggesting limited movement towards an academic literacies model in which language practices are embedded within core discipline teaching and assessment. The arts faculty of university 3 is particularly notable for offering credited and compulsory English support courses delivered by the central DELT, marking a departure from faculty-controlled provision seen elsewhere. From a

language policy and management perspective, this arrangement indicates a strong institutional-level intervention to raise EMI standards and positions the DELT as a key agent rather than a peripheral service unit. However, centralized delivery may also distance language instruction from discipline-specific practices unless strong collaboration mechanisms are in place.

Subject Benchmark Statements

This study also analyzed the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) to identify the SLHE expectations for graduates in their communication at the end of degree programs. SLQF states the English communication standards that are expected from a graduate (SLQF- Level 5/6) at the end of their degree as follows:

Table 5 - Communication Standards of SLQF- Level 5/6, (UGC SLQF-2016, p.26).

Categories of Learning Outcomes	SLQF – Level 5 bachelor’s degree	SLQF – Level 6 Bachelor's Honours Degree
3.Communication	Present information, ideas, and concepts efficiently and effectively	Present information, ideas, and concepts efficiently and effectively Demonstrate awareness of the current developments in the area of study

Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

The above standards are not medium-of-instruction-specific, but they indicate the generic communication skills expected of a graduate. The English support courses offered by the selected universities emphasize the communicative outcomes outlined in the SLQF. Further, SLHE subject benchmark statements are analyzed to assess the alignment of English support courses with them. However, it was evident that subject benchmark statements provide non-specific,

common attributes they expect of graduates, regardless of the degree's medium of instruction. For example, the following table summarizes the selected subject benchmark statements, particularly those related to the communication attributes of science, social science, and management graduates.

Subject Benchmark Statements of Communication for Selected Subjects in SLHE

Table 6 - Subject Benchmark Statements (Communication Attributes) for Selected Subjects in SLHE.

Type of the Degree	Name of the Degree	Communication Attributes
Social Sciences and Humanities	Journalism and Communication Studies	4. Skills and Attitudes 4.1 The graduates will also be able to communicate effectively in interpersonal settings, in writing, and in a variety of media Apply communication skills in dealing with audiences, clients, consumers, markets, sources, and/or users (UGC Subject Benchmark Statement, Journalism and Communication Studies, 2013, p.5).
Management	Management	4. Skills and Attitudes 4.1.1c. Effective communication, oral and in writing, using a range of media which are widely used in management, for example, the preparation and presentation of management reports 4.1.1j. Interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion, and presentation (UGC Subject Benchmark Statement, Management, 2010, p.5).

Source: Developed by the author using subject benchmarks proposed by SLQF.

However, the subject benchmark statements in the Food Science and Technology degree program at university 1 provide a broader approach to communication skills than those in other degree programs. For example, it states:

The Subject Benchmark Statements in the Food Science and Technology Degree

“Communication skills (with special emphasis on scientific communication);

- receiving, evaluating, and responding to a variety of information sources (e.g., electronic, textual, numerical, verbal, graphical);
- communicating accurately, clearly, concisely, confidently, and appropriately to a variety of audiences in written, verbal, and graphical forms;
- contributing constructively to group discussions;

- listening to, appreciating, and evaluating the views of others.” (UGC Subject Benchmark Statement, Food Science and Technology, 2010, p.8)

Compared with the above statements, this benchmark may help assess students' linguistic achievements in that EMI degree program and may serve as a model for others.

UTEL Benchmarks Reflected in the Curriculum

The University Test of English Language (UTEL) is a benchmark series proposed by the UGC to assess undergraduates' linguistic achievements. It illustrates the level of proficiency desirable in an academic context for each of the reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills areas. These benchmarks are also not specified in terms of the medium of instruction. When benchmarks are generally stated and applied to both English-medium degrees and Sinhala/Tamil-medium degrees, the assessment process may over-assess

Sinhala/Tamil-medium undergraduates while under-assessing English-medium undergraduates. However, this benchmark series may be used in English-medium degrees to identify the desired linguistic achievement levels of undergraduates in the absence of medium-specific benchmarks.

Of the nine faculties, only one management faculty (university 1) mentions aligning its courses with the UTEL benchmarks. It offers ESP course units that are non-credit, but the final result appears on the detailed result sheet. These units are English for Business Economics Part I, II, III, and IV. These are designed with the UTEL benchmarks that the particular department uses in the curriculum, and explain this process in the prospectus as follows:

“BEC2001: English for Business Economics Part I

The BEC 2001 course on English for Business Economics is designed with the aim of enhancing the four competency skills of reading, listening, writing and speaking skills of the students in the field of Business Economics. The courses have been formulated according to the UTEL Benchmark band of 6, which will develop the skills of the students to comfortably reach the benchmark band of 7, the course will proceed in a gradual and an incremental manner. ...” (USJ Prospectus, 2019, p. 58)

Even though the features of embedded curricula practices, in which mediating language and the subject matter are integrated to support overall academic success in EMI, are not shown, the analysis of English support courses offered at the selected universities reflects their alignment with national-level requirements, as discussed above.

Institutional Structural Arrangements of ELT Staff

Regarding the institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff in three universities and nine faculties, there are standard and unique features.

All three universities have DELTs, and language lecturers/instructors are attached to them and serve English-language and EMI needs across the faculties. All selected faculties at university 2 receive services from the ELT staff to meet their English language and EMI needs. This arrangement shows a strong centralized system established in that university.

The other two universities also showcase the same strong centralized system of DELT English support courses, except for the management faculties of universities 1 and 3 and the science faculty of university 3. The two management faculties of universities 1 and 3 each have their own Business Communication Units (BCU) and language lecturers/instructors, which offer all English support courses to their respective faculties under the guidance of management faculty academic staff, showcasing some features of a decentralized institutional structure. In that case, the content and language lecturers/instructors collaborate in the teaching-learning process, curriculum development, and assessment (i.e., at the management faculty of university 3 - drawing topics from management disciplines for presentations, essay writing, or paragraph development), and identify faculty-specific and department-specific EMI needs. The Faculty of Applied Sciences also has an ELTU with language instructors at university 3.

Collaborations in EMI

In line with the research objectives, this section explores how content lecturers and ELT staff conceptualize collaboration within EMI.

Overloaded DELT Lecturers/Instructors

It is worthwhile to analyze the role of ELT staff in the present SLHE context, where EMI is in increasing demand. As defined by (Raune, 2003), ELT staff are expected to develop undergraduates' English-language proficiency across diverse disciplinary contexts. Within SLHE, these expectations translate into substantial teaching responsibilities, and due to various factors, DELT lecturers/instructors are already overloaded with large student populations.

A content lecturer (Lecturer 37) from an arts faculty effectively reflects this perception in her comments,

Yeah, they are revising syllabuses from time to time, and they offer a variety of courses, and actually, they have hectic work to do there. Overloaded with work, right? And ...uh... they are doing different courses... the teaching courses for teachers and language separately for language students, and then for other students... commerce, science, and their requirements are different. They have designed different courses for them as well, to meet their requirements. So, they have heavy work to do, and their work is commendable.

Describing ELT staff's work as "commendable" recognizes their labour-intensive, multifaceted responsibilities within the institution. Except in three controlled instances, the institutional structural arrangements for ELT staff at three selected universities generally serve the entire university student population, leaving DELT ELT staff overloaded and struggling to meet quality standards. Still, this study emphasizes an additional role 'assigned' to them as a result of the introduction of EMI. Therefore, ELT staff is currently being urged to take on a collaborative academic development practitioner role in EMI, to develop mediating English across disciplines, and to support content staff with CPD. This transition from ELT practitioner to EMI practitioner, and the often back-and-forth between the two roles, can be challenging for the SLHE ELT staff due to limited and controlled human resources within the system.

This study also draws attention to an emerging redefinition of the role of ELT staff in the EMI context. Evidence across the nine faculties suggests a tendency for ELT staff to be positioned primarily within English support courses, with a predominant focus on English language proficiency development. While instances of collaboration were identified, these were not consistently embedded within EMI as part of a broader academic development role, indicating a pattern rather than a definitive institutional model.

Need for Discipline-Specific Courses

The analysis of lecturer interviews reflects views on collaboration between content lecturers and language lecturers/instructors. Content lecturers indicate the need for embedded English support courses and ELT staff in their disciplines. The following excerpts from content lecturers show how they perceive the discipline-specific approach.

Lecturer 19:

---...they cater for the common needs. Because we have some unique ...areas. We have some subject specific needs. If the lecturers are attached to our faculty then we can discuss and then... yes, we can discuss even...we have some authority to...the amends and do some instruction ... other things. But when the ELTD handle then they will come and teach only the grammar and general English.

Lecturer 3:

---their vocabulary is very poor in the sense of academic content so therefore they cannot captured those ideas clearly at the beginning because ...uh... they...they have learnt English but just basic English here... but not directly related to the economics or academic content...so that's the problem.

Lecturer 21:

Those should be separately for each faculty if we can do it for each degree programme.... subject-specific... not like common...general...common. Then they will learn technical terms and everything and get ready for the ... to follow the subject.

Lecturer 11:

---Because actually that degree program actually we are conducting in English medium. So, therefore English is essential. Especially for technical language... if we can improve their technical knowledge...sometimes you know general English is not enough. According to my knowledge 50%, 50% better technical at the beginning...and general. ...you know--

Taken together, these perceptions highlight the perceived limitations of general English provision in adequately supporting students' engagement with disciplinary knowledge in English-medium programs. Lecturers consistently emphasized that students' difficulties stem not from a lack of basic English proficiency per se, but from insufficient exposure to academic and technical vocabulary specific to their fields of study. From this perspective, discipline-specific English courses are viewed as essential for enabling students to access, interpret, and articulate subject-related concepts more effectively within EMI contexts.

The emphasis on subject-specific terminology and academic discourse suggests that generic English support is perceived as insufficient preparation for the linguistic demands of disciplinary learning, particularly in technical fields. These perceptions underscore the importance of aligning English support provision with disciplinary epistemologies and communicative practices, thereby positioning discipline-specific English courses as a critical intermediary between general language proficiency and successful participation in EMI degree programs.

As can be seen from the above excerpts, subject lecturers recognize the importance of EAP/ESP, discipline-specific English support courses, or discipline-specific English language teaching. Prospectuses of all three management faculties included EAP/ESP courses in their curricula. Furthermore, the two management faculties (universities 1 and 3) obtained services from faculty-owned language lecturers/instructors. This trend emphasizes the need for integrated approaches in EMI. Further, a language lecturer highlights the

importance of subject lecturers' involvement in the enhancement of academic development in EMI.

Further collaborations between subject lecturers and the ELT staff.

Lecturer 39:

---English taught in isolation does not work in the long run. It works as a go-between, whereas when the discipline lecturers deal with the matter itself, there is direct, immediate application of the language.

The above excerpt by a language lecturer argues that stand-alone English instruction is insufficient for sustained academic development in EMI. By stating that "English taught in isolation does not work in the long run," the participant critiques decontextualized language teaching that is detached from disciplinary content. The metaphor of English as a "go-between" may suggest that generic English courses function only as a temporary or intermediary support rather than as a mechanism for deep academic engagement.

In contrast, this language lecturer emphasizes the pedagogical value of discipline lecturers directly addressing language within subject teaching, arguing that this enables "direct, immediate application of the language." This phrase indicates a belief that students acquire academic language more effectively when the mediating language is embedded in authentic disciplinary practices, such as lectures, discussions, assignments, and assessments, rather than taught separately. Overall, the excerpt reflects a preference for integrated language and content instruction, where language learning is inseparable from disciplinary meaning making.

As shown above, when discipline-specific English courses are introduced, faculty-owned or department-owned language lecturers/instructors are expected to work closely with the subject lecturers across all three stages of the teaching-learning process – pre-, during-, and post-teaching. In such cases, collaborations with subject course coordinators and language lecturers lead to identifying writing needs that undergraduates require to complete course assignments, reports, or projects in various disciplines. However, such embedded English courses were not evident in any of the faculties in this study, except for the three instances mentioned above, related to two management faculties (universities 1 and 3) and a science faculty (university 3) that recruited faculty-owned language lecturers/instructors.

The above discussion informs the additional role of ELT staff as academic development practitioners in the EMI. Additionally, they may support content lecturers in identifying language needs in their own disciplines by providing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) using the CLIL approach, which informs effective integrated strategies of content and language. Such collaborations might strengthen the academic development in EMI.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the nature of the English support courses and the roles/institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff across nine faculties at three state universities

offering EMI. It has been concluded that all nine faculties offered English support courses in EMI as stand-alone courses. Among these discrete English courses were EAP/ESP courses, and such instances can be considered within the academic socialization model. There was evidence of the discipline-specific courses serving department-specific needs. Regarding the roles/institutional structural arrangements of ELT staff, there were three instances in which ELT staff exclusively served faculty-specific EMI needs. This integration of discipline-specific content and the linguistic aspect into the mainstream classroom aims to develop undergraduates' academic development in EMI. Such practices are vital to the curriculum design process and to the academic development of undergraduates in EMI.

The findings indicate that English support within EMI across the selected faculties is predominantly organized through stand-alone courses, with EAP and ESP provision aligning broadly with an academic socialization model. While discipline-specific English courses address department-level linguistic needs, the limited integration of ELT staff into mainstream disciplinary teaching suggests a continued structural separation between language and content. Faculty-specific arrangements in which ELT staff supported EMI more directly point to the potential value of integrated academic development roles in enhancing undergraduate learning in EMI contexts.

This study is limited by its focus on three state universities and nine faculties, which constrains the transferability of the findings. As a qualitative inquiry, the findings represent interpretive patterns rather than generalizable conclusions.

At an institutional level, it may be useful to reflect on the balance between stand-alone English support courses and more integrated forms of language support within EMI programs. Greater clarity regarding the roles and positioning of ELT staff in relation to academic development could support more coherent curriculum design. Continued attention to discipline-specific English provision may help align language support more closely with the academic demands of different faculties.

Future research could examine a wider range of institutions to explore the prevalence of similar structural arrangements. Longitudinal and comparative research on stand-alone versus integrated English support models may further inform EMI-related academic development.

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The Effect of Interpersonal Norms on Business Performance of Retail Traders in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka: Mediating Role of Transaction Costs

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Abstract

Scholars highlighted that interpersonal norms are essential to promoting social bonds that work as substitutes for legal bonds among exchange partners. Interpersonal norms encourage informal and unwritten agreements between business parties that influence the minimization of transaction costs among exchange partners, thereby enhancing their business performance. However, there is no sufficient empirical evidence in the context of Sri Lankan retail traders and how interpersonal norms affect the transaction costs, and thereby business performance. The current study attempts to address this empirical gap employing a quantitative method. Primary data was collected from 255 retail traders through pre-tested structured questionnaires with face-to-face interviews. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance of retail traders, together with a significant negative effect between interpersonal norms and transaction costs, and business performance. Results further exhibit that transaction cost has a partial mediating role in the relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance. Thus, the study statistically confirmed the existing empirical understandings of the extensive influence of interpersonal norms on the business performance of retail traders by mitigating transaction costs. Eventually, the findings emphasize that strong interpersonal norms among exchange partners can enhance business performance through the decrease of transaction costs.

Keywords: Business Performance, Interpersonal Norms, Retail Traders, Transaction Costs.

INTRODUCTION

As one of the fastest-growing service sectors, the retail trade performs as the most powerful trading intermediary in the world (Noland et al., 2012). Retailing commenced its evolution from the ancient period with the emergence of the barter system, it's begun to spread widely around the nations since the 20th century (Tiwari, 2009). Today, it has contributed more to creating jobs, helping supply chain activities, and providing high-quality final products or services for end customers (Akanbi et al., 2024). The retail sector is generally comprised of two categories, such as organized and unorganized industries (Hameli, 2018). Organized retail traders are the license holders who registered for sales tax and income tax, and they maintain businesses largely and bear the largest retail chains (Akanbi et al., 2024). Unorganized retail traders comprise shops and general stores, which follow conventional low-cost retailing, contributing to different levels (Hameli, 2018). Accordingly, the global retail sector has witnessed substantial growth over the years. This significantly contributes to the world economy (Llop, 2023).

The retail traders are extremely connected to the relational contract with exchange partners since it is one of the most

substantial sectors involves to the people (Martadisastra & Faisal, 2021). The long-term informal exchange relationship among exchange partners is known as a Relational Contract (RC) (MacNeil, 1985). It contains exact mechanisms that cannot be enforced by a third party, such as court, and certain absolute elements that make it impossible for third parties to confirm whether the parties have fulfilled their obligations under the contract (Baker et al., 2002). According to Gibbons (2005); Mouzas and Blois (2008), a relational contract (RC) is a self-enforcing agreement that is fixed within the exchange parties in specific circumstances. Empirical findings recognized the four main dimensions in the RC as 1) interpersonal trust (Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) 2) Relational norms (MacNeil, 1985) 3) Cognitive capital (Choi et al., 2012), and strength of ties (Han et al., 1993), which boost the mutual relationships of exchange parties. Among the dimensions, relational norms that encourage collaboration while raising businesses with repeated transactions, and these norms increase understanding, planning, communication, and problem-solving. However, as a core aspect in the RC, interpersonal norms support the expansion of the business's performance in the long-term environment

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(Poppo & Zenger, 2002) while mitigating the transaction cost (Yousef, 2017). Williamson (1979) described transaction costs as the expenses related to the operation of the economic system of enterprises in the Transaction Cost Theory (TCT). Most retail traders in the market depend completely on relational agreements with their exchange partners to maintain extremely high standards of performance in their business satisfaction (Dwyer et al., 1987; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Mysen et al. (2011) highlighted how norms influence and how long-term commercial partnerships develop in terms of quality. The development of the quality of continuing commercial partnerships is influenced by norms. Samouel (2007) showed more evidence of the positive relationship between norms and business performance by highlighting the fact that relational norms encourage business dealers to establish long-term commercial partnerships in the world scenario. Different scholars such as Achrol and Gundlach (1999); Paswan and Young (1999) observed and highlighted the indirect impact in between interpersonal norms and transaction cost through the studies and highlighted the indirect impact of interpersonal norms on transaction costs in the world context. Furthermore, Gamage and Priyanath (2019) underlined the intervention of interpersonal norms to enhance the commercial success of the gem dealers while mitigating opportunism over integrating communication, cooperation, and trust among partners. In addition, norms promote the performance of small and medium-sized businesses and reduce transaction costs (Priyanath & Habaragamuwa, 2023; Priyanath & Hathella, 2022).

Sri Lanka's retail sector is a significant economic contributor, accounting for about 14% of GDP and employing over 15% of the workforce in 2023. A significant portion of the Sri Lankan retail industry operates within the informal sector. Some retail activities of Sri Lanka are mainly administered by the relationship-dominated arrangement where personal connection and repeated transactions play a fundamental role in smoothing the exchanges (Gamage & Priyanath, 2019). Conventionally, the retail industry has expanded without a set of standard regulations and written contracts in Sri Lanka. Thus, RC of retail traders avoids the need for legal agreement (Priyanath & Hathella, 2022), assisting in minimizing the costs of transactions to promote their businesses for success. Under these circumstances, retail traders are willing to comply with the regulations set forth by their business partners under the shared knowledge and understanding that ensures the security of their transactions above cost reduction for the improvement of their businesses (Isharyani et al., 2023). In the global context, studies such as Anderson and Narus (1990) and Singh et al. (2025) shown that the positive impact of interpersonal norms on business performance. However, there were lack of empirical evidence to recognize how interpersonal norms impact transaction cost and business performance predominantly in the retail sector in Sri Lanka. Thus, existing study objects to explore the effect of interpersonal norms on transaction cost and business performance in Sri Lanka. Also, this study separately discovers the effect of interpersonal norms on transaction costs and company performance and the indirect effects of transaction costs on the relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance. Moreover, this study contributes to minimizing the empirical research gap by emphasizing the influence of sociological theory on economic decision-making through the integration of three theories: economic theory (transaction cost), management

theory (business performance), and sociological theory (interpersonal norms).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section mainly aims to deliver the theoretical background of interpersonal norms, transaction cost and business performance. Further, this examines the empirical evidence to justify hypotheses.

Interpersonal norms: MacNeil (1980) originally proposed the theory of interpersonal norms, which is defined as how a group of decision-makers partly shared the behavioral expectations (Gibbs, 1981; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and further, it described the level of knowledge of the exchange partners about their legal agreement, which they see as the strategies for proper and satisfactory behaviors, creating bounds (MacNeil, 1980). Further, MacNeil (1980) emphasized that exchange participants can fulfil both inner values and economic aspects if they are well-read in the existing set of transactional and relational norms because it effectively facilitates carrying on exchange actions among parties (Canon et al. 2000). Interpersonal norms described beyond this general definition, researchers reveal how norms would be observed and thought in different respects (Axelrod, 1986; Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985). An individual or parties adapt main set of attitudes and behaviours in their exchange process (Doucette, 1996) and establish all values over a long-term procedure (Dwyer et al., 1987; Scanzoni, 1979).

In the individual context, individuals are supposed to remain autonomous in an exchange structure following self-governing strategies as well as goals. Relational norms are 'Tactic knowledge' and 'explicit knowledge' are the popular classifications of knowledge (Darvish & Nikbakhsh, 2010). Explicit is the knowledge which can be voiced, systemized and stored in a certain place. Conversely, tactic knowledge is another kind of knowledge which is complicated to transfer to any other form, in means of writing down or verbalizing (Darvish & Nikbakhsh, 2010). Chow and Chan (2008) further emphasized that knowledge sharing provides incentive rewards such as trust and relationship, etc., concerning the other side, which is improving the relationship through long-term bilateral policies and shared interests (Gundlach et al., 1995; Heide & John, 1992).

Further, MacNeil (1980) highlighted norms as predominant to set the governance mechanism of exchange interaction. Both individual organizations and groups of individuals apply interpersonal norms in various levels (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975; Gouldner, 1960). Ehrhart and Naumann (2004) stated that parties with lesser interaction are less likely to be directed by norms. Nevertheless, those with higher interaction will be guided by norms and will carefully detect their behaviours. Relational norms are identified by different scholars as a major construct of relational exchanges. Thus, the most popular ten dimensions of relational norms recognized in this study are; flexibility (Kaufmann & Stern, 1988), integrity (Kaufmann & Dant, 1992; MacNeil, 1985), solidarity (Heide & John, 1992; Kaufmann & Dant, 1992; MacNeil, 1985; Noordewier et al., 1990) and information exchange (Heide & John, 1992).

Flexibility is a requirement for the solidity of the relationship, a means for each party to continue to play the role it

was assigned in the relationship, and a means for parties to resolve their relational conflicts that may be caused by unforeseeable events. Flexibility is a prerequisite for the solidity of the relationship (Zhu et al., 2021). A need demanded by the relation's broader social matrix; a component of consent and the construction of power when parties shift their priorities within the relationship and demand a reorientation of the substance of their or their counterparty's promises in light of a shift in the relation's parameters. The parties also assume that it is fair and appropriate to be able to alter the content of the relation in accordance with uncertainties, and they anticipate that their counterparties will continue to exert effort toward accomplishing flexibility (Barron & Powell, 2019).

According to Medlin and Quester (2001), solidarity is linked to commitment, which is an important component that plays a substantial part in contributing to the achievement of a construction partnership. It is possible that a crucial predictor of the possibility of a long-term partnership within the construction industry is the presence of solidarity in supply chain ties within the construction industry. The concept of solidarity contracts with relative importance linked, belief, and future supportive purposes as opposed to arm's length and enforcement in the preservation of the transaction process (Dant & Schul, 1992; Kaufmann & Stern, 1988). This refers to the degree to which an exchange connection is dominated by the sense of unity or fellowship that results from having obligations and interests in common (Gundlach et al., 1995; Kaufmann & Dant, 1992). To put it another way, it is the maintenance of the partnership, especially when one of the partners is in a difficult situation (Ivens, 2004). It manifests itself via actions, which provide a direct contribution to the preservation of relationships (Heide & John, 1992; MacNeil, 1980).

The concept of integrity has been examined not only in literature on ethics but also in the disciplines of organizational behavior, psychology, human resource management, and theories of leadership (Treviño & Rodriguez, 2007). Integrity demonstrated by actions and commitment to work that are shaped by the advice of others (Calhoun, 1995). This originates once we operate in accordance with our values, ideals, and beliefs. Integrity is therefore a dynamic factor that may be formed via social communication, mutual accommodation, and is hence independent of any one person (Treviño & Rodriguez, 2007). Since integrity is naturally enclosed by human, it is easy to reflect the disciplines as a fundamental basis for personal behavioral characteristics. However, this concept is the result that is obtained when both spouses fulfil their own roles. It is related to the intricacy of the trading relationship, which goes beyond the scope of individual transactions (Kaufmann & Dant, 1992). According to the relational exchange theory, parties involved in the exchange processes have particular responsibilities that they need to fulfil (Ivens, 2004).

Information exchange, which is also known as sharing knowledge, refers to the expectation shared by both parties that they would proactively provide information that is helpful to the other (Heide & John, 1992). It is anticipated that both parties will convey a wide variety of information that is seen as being significant for the development of the business relationship. Knowledge is the benefits obtain by the individual who is willing to work with information (Darvish &

Nikbakhsh, 2010). Information sharing has been recognized as a relational standard by a number of scholars, as stated by Bleeke and Ernst (1993). 'Tactic knowledge' and 'explicit knowledge' are the popular classifications of knowledge (Darvish & Nikbakhsh, 2010). Explicit is the knowledge which can be voiced, systemized and stored in a certain place. Conversely, tactic knowledge is another kind of knowledge which is complicated to transfer to any other form, in means of writing down or verbalizing (Darvish & Nikbakhsh, 2010).

Transaction Cost: The term "transaction cost economics" refers to different ways of arranging governance structures of transactions, such as markets, hybrids, businesses, and bureaucracies that aim to reduce the amount of money that is lost due to transaction fees (Williamson, 1979). According to the Theory of Transaction Cost developed by Williamson in the 1970s, the optimal administrative structure is one that maximises economic efficiency while reducing transaction costs to the absolute minimum. According to this interpretation of the theory, the coordination costs connected with monitoring, regulating, and managing transactions are produced by each different kind of contract. Williamson (1979) has provided a wide definition of transaction costs as the expenses associated with the operation of the economic system of enterprises. He has claimed that these costs should be differentiated from production costs, and that a decision-maker may choose whether or not to employ a firm structure or source from the market by comparing transaction costs with the costs of producing goods or services internally. Consequently, cost is the key factor that plays a role in such a selection. Nevertheless, in the real world, businesses organize themselves into hierarchies and use their power to distribute resources in the most effective way possible. On the other hand, markets make use of the bargaining power of their participants in order to distribute resources. Due to constrained rationality and imperfect knowledge, the TCE theory asserts that hierarchies are able to more effectively and efficiently distribute resources than markets.

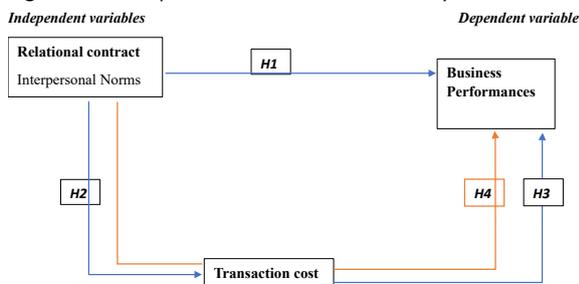
The concept of transaction costs has been the subject of research in a wide variety of fields, including but not limited to economics, organization theory, and contract law, amongst others (Williamson, 2007). The TC theory is a flexible instrument that may be used in the management of subcontractors. It encompasses monetary, behavioral, and organizational considerations, respectively. However, there are significant holes in the TC theory, the most notable of which is the absence of a supply chain broad perspective. Studies on trade and commerce often investigate bilateral relationships (Wever et al., 2012). However, since subcontracting is increasingly becoming an important aspect of doing business in the manufacturing sector, there is a pressing need to conduct research that covers the whole of the supply chain or the entire network. According to (Häkkinen, 2011), the transaction costs associated with the subcontracting business may be very variable from one instance to the next. In this study, we want to investigate these causes in depth, taking into consideration the many different parties that make up the subcontractor network.

Business Performance: According to (Michel & Barony, 1998), performance is characterized as a set of multidimensional constructions that include contract formulation, planning, supervision, and support (Schneider, 1986). Improved businesses generate money, accumulate surpluses within,

and support the growth rate necessary for continued success in the market on outside forces (Rizal et al., 2017). Thus, performance is defined as a collection of multidimensional constructs (Michel & Barony, 1998) that comprises the functions of contract formation, planning, supervision, and assistance (Schneider, 1986). Better performing companies derive profits, gain surplus internally, and contribute to the growth rate surviving in the market externally (Rizal et al. 2017). Accordingly, Smith and Reece (1999) pointed out "business performance" as an organization's managerial activities that are carried out to achieve its objectives and targets. The same metrics used to assess an organization's profitability, earnings per share, and sales growth are also used to determine if it is successful or unsuccessful (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). Nonetheless, Keltner (2012) emphasized the importance of using both non-financial and financial variables as indicators for evaluating the validity of this concept. Financial criteria are used to calculate non-monetary long-period growth and to assess the short-period progress of the entire organization (Moers, 2000), financial outcomes. However, based on Carton and Hofer (2006), financial performance directly connects with the amount of money we generate. According to (Boniface et al., 2012), non-financial performance responds to mutual understanding, trust, and contract satisfaction.

Conceptual framework: Conventional theories of economics point out the rational behavior of economic actors, and they assume that producers always attempt to maximize their own profits while minimizing costs. On the other hand, consumers make an effort to maximize their utility (Feldman & Serrano, 2005). As the theory states, rational people always try to maximize their gains (Jensen, 2000) in any situation while steadily trying to minimize their losses. However, Figure 1 illustrates three types of direct relationships between variables and two indirect relationships. There are three effects among interpersonal norms: transaction cost and business performance, while transaction cost mediates the impact of transaction cost on the relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance. The vertical relationship among the business partners stabilizes the self-enforcing safeguard for business success (MacNeil, 1978). Interpersonal norms provide a specific guarantee to confirm the long-term interrelationship among buyers and sellers of the relational contract, which provides access to reduce transaction costs and ultimately enhance the performance of businesses (Jeffries & Reed, 2000).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Developed by the Author, 2025.

Hypotheses

Inter-personal Norms and Business Performance: Inter-personal norms are recognized by the business organizations for the better development of the business relationship life

circle model (Dwyer et al., 1987; Scanzoni, 1979). Business parties develop mutual understanding with a strong business relationship among them to improve the performance of the business, mitigating uncertainty (Priyanath, et al., 2016). Basically, norms describe the behavioral expectations among parties involved in the exchange. On the other hand, relational norms represent a kind of endogenous procedure controlled by relational values on the relationship rather than controlled by incentives or finance (Ting et al., 2007). Exchange parties develop norms as long-term procedures through collective behaviors and attitudes (Doucette, 1996; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) in the governance mechanism (MacNeil, 1980). Accordingly, Kim and Choi (1994) observed the importance of the systematically developed norms framework to evaluate the real interaction between buyers and sellers, solving governance issues, thus enhancing business performance. Exchange partners are able to achieve unique cultural norms and expectations by minimizing conflict behaviors (Kaufmann & Dant, 1992; MacNeil, 1980) while enhancing the mutual accommodation and performance of business. Exchange partners do not have any fear about future problems that may occur because the mutual relationship they have is in line with the concept of solidarity, as individuals share much more flexible and reliable information than other partners, and working with them is quite easy. Inter-personal norms grow synergetic problem-solving processes, and adjusting the responsibilities with requirements between exchange partners (Boyle et al., 1992) will affect the performance of the business. Both contractual and social safeguards are created between exchange partners when contracting parties' ties with relational norms are in harmony in the long term (Vázquez et al., 2007), and that leads to increased profit ratios and overall performance of business entities. Therefore, the study assumes that;

H1; Interpersonal norms have a positive effect on the business performance of retail traders in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka.

Inter-personal Norms and Transaction Cost: Different scholars, such as Achrol and Gundlach, (1999); Doucette, (1996); Paswan and Young, (1999) observed and highlighted the indirect impact of interpersonal norms and transaction cost through their studies. Honest behavior among the exchange partners creates strong commitment in order to sustain an accommodative and supportive long-term relationship (Dant & Schul, 1992). A long-term continuous relationship makes relational norms with an improved mindset between exchange partners (Rokkan et al., 2003). Opportunistic behaviors and uncertainty among actors that emerge through information asymmetry are curtailed by the interpersonal norms (Heide & John, 1992) and eventually help to reduce the transaction cost (Heide & John, 1992) as well. However, transaction costs among exchange partners increase with numerous barriers to obtaining more reliable information, which is called opportunism. On the other side, parties are unable to forecast dynamic changes that occur in the external environment, which is called uncertainty (Abdi & Aulakh, 2014), which has happened in the situation of information asymmetry (Xinyan et al., 2013) cause a rise in transaction cost. The cost of transaction diminishes with long-term mutual understanding among partners and strong agreements (Priyanath, et al., 2016). Accordingly, interpersonal norms demonstrate an alternative safe protector

against opportunism, uncertainty, and the cost of transaction (Tuusjärvi & Möller, 2009). Transaction cost goes down with a fair and common understanding between parties because it lowers the monitoring cost (Kaufmann & Stern, 1988). Further, Kaufmann and Stern (1988) highlighted the importance of reducing disputes between the partners. Lowest dispute and disagreement, encouraging the partners towards informal, honest agreement rather than legal procedures by minimizing enforcement costs. Thus, this study assumes that there is a negative relationship between interpersonal norms and the cost of transaction.

H2; Interpersonal norms have a negative effect on the transaction cost of retail traders in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka.

Transaction Cost and Business Performance: Organizational performance is the dedication of a company towards its stakeholders and consumers, necessary for successful job management (Wu & Zhao, 2008). Conversely, the level of income that the business organization generates within a specific time frame can be utilized for the theory of firms and the transaction cost theory (Rauch et al., 2004). The main characteristics of the transaction cost have a significant impact on the business's performance. Small businesses usually have to incur significant search costs for discovering knowledgeable employees, customers, sellers, and other partners in order to identify reliable transactions, minimize exchange risk, and improve overall organizational performance (Carmel, 2005). However, the success of the organization lies with the extent of exchange parties' confidence (Kaufmann & Stern, 1988). Less confidence among partners generates huge enforcement costs and thereby less organizational success. Carmel (2005) discovered that search costs and business performance have a negative association. Organizations incur costs in order to monitor their exchange partners to diminish unethical practices, which are able to bring negative results towards business, to keep their well-being (Nootboom, 1993). Accordingly, the parties engage in retail trading activities, bear various kinds of costs in the process of transaction. Transaction depends basically on trustworthiness, commitment among each other, the extent of access to more reliable information among members in the retail industry, while considering the cost of the transaction. The importance of the lowest searching cost for an efficient business performance has been recognized by Dyer and Chu (1997). There is a lack of trust between the parties involved in transaction operations, and as a result, performance inside any business is declining (Dyer, 1997). The important correlation between supplier performance and business performance has been demonstrated by Ntayi et al. (2010). An organization's supply chain performance is directly affected by factors such as late delivery, inadequate delivery speeds, unreliable delivery, and the level of quality of goods and services provided across exchange partners (Ntayi et al., 2010). Companies are responsible for the monitoring of their exchange partners in order to prevent unethical behavior that could harm their business while sustaining their well-being (Nootboom, 1993). Therefore, the study predicts that;

H3; Transaction cost has a negative effect on the performance of retail traders in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka

The mediating role of Inter-personal Norms: MacNeil (2000) found that interpersonal norms, which include solidarity, flexibility, role of integrity, reciprocity, and information sharing, have a significant inverse relationship with transaction costs. In addition, Achrol and Gundlach (1999), Doucette (1996), and Paswan and Young (1999) have observed and highlighted the indirect impact of interpersonal norms on transaction costs through their studies. According to Dant and Schul (1992), honest behavior among exchange partners creates a strong commitment to sustaining an accommodative and supportive long-term relationship. This long-term relationship makes relational norms with an improved mindset between exchange partners (Rokkan et al., 2003). Kaufmann and Stern (1988) highlighted the importance of reducing disputes between partners to lower monitoring and enforcement costs. Lowest disputes and disagreements encourage partners towards informal, honest agreements rather than legal procedures, thus minimizing enforcement costs. In addition, norms provide a positive mindset and opportunity for exchange partners to make specific adjustments to agreements once they fall into uncertain situations (Heide & John, 1992), thereby reducing enforcement costs as a dimension of transaction costs. According to Misztal (1996), transaction costs are minimized by honest and authentic behaviors of both parties, which can keep their sturdy association without the intervention of a third party. Therefore, there is no need to bear the cost of finding new partners. Thus, this study assumes that an indirect negative association between interpersonal norms and transaction costs creates a positive impact on the performance of the retail industry.

H4; Transaction cost has a mediated role in the relationship between interpersonal norms and BP of retail traders in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

Since all of the variables are derived from established theories, the study methodology is identified as deductive, and the philosophy is positivism. Retail traders in this study are recognized as the unit of analysis. Since the study's target respondent group comprised Sri Lankan retail traders, the population included retail traders from all around the country. The study's sample was selected by a multistage cluster sampling method. First, out of all 25 districts, the Gampaha district was selected using simple random sampling. The Gampaha district comprises 13 secretariat divisions, and one village from each and every secretariat division in the Gampaha district was selected based on the cluster sampling. Every retail trader in selected villages was taken to the sample. Accordingly, data were gathered from 255 retail traders using the standardized structured questionnaires. A structured questionnaire was utilized in the study's quantitative approach for collecting primary data to assess the conceptual model. A 10-point percentage scale was used to assess each question. In the questionnaire, separate questions were asked to collect the data on independent, dependent, and mediating variables such as interpersonal norms, business performance, and transaction costs.

Interpersonal norms are measured using four dimensions, including integrity, flexibility, sharing information, and solidarity (Mayer et al., 1999). Based on the previous studies carried out by Kim and Choi (1994), Lumpkin and Dess, (1996), Moers (2000), and Zahra and Covin (1993), the de-

pendent variable of this study was determined over two dimensions: financial performance and non-financial performance. Four dimensions: researching costs, negotiation costs, monitoring costs, and enforcement costs, were used to determine the transaction cost. These categories were adopted by Kim and Choi (1994), Moers (2000) and Sako (1992).

In order to investigate hypothetical relationships, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used as a significant statistical analytical method to evaluate the relationship between independent and dependent variables using SmartPLS (version 04). PLS-SEM assessed the validity and reliability of each construct over a measurement model prior to the structural model. The multicollinearity test, path coefficient analysis, R-square (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance analysis were tested over the structural model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This descriptive analysis was constructed on 255 retail traders in the Gampaha district, and it was found that the majority of the retail traders are in the age 40-49 category. In addition, 217 respondents in the survey were mail retail traders. This study further realized that 65% of the respondents were married in the sample, 98 respondents had completed their education up to A/L, and 60 respondents obtained a certificate of technical and vocational education. In terms of selling product categories, 78 percent of respondents sell grocery items, including food and beverages, while 39 percent sell motor vehicles and parts. 77 respondents out of the total recorded had 4-6 family members, which is basically an implied nuclear type of family. Moreover, this sample high-

lighted the information that the highest number of respondents (117) were independent retailers, 72 respondents reported being part of a family business, 54 respondents reported running a home-based business, and 12 respondents described being subcontractors. Finally, this study revealed that the majority (88 respondents) fell into the monthly income range of 65,001–85,000.

Reliability and validity: The indicator reliability and the internal consistency of the reliability of the questionnaire items were studied in this analysis. Outer loading values and T-statistics are used to observe indicator reliability. Cronbach's alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values are used to evaluate the internal consistency of reliability. On the other hand, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) approach is used to establish Convergent Validity (CV) under construct validity. Discriminant validity is established using the Fornell-Lacker criterion, which is alternatively referred to as the square root of AVE in each latent variable suggested by Fornell (1981).

Table 1 shows that internal consistency reliability, and it is recommended that all components of the questionnaire relating to the independent variables and mediator variables have established indicator reliability if the outer loading value is 0.7 or above. Table 1 further demonstrates that all questionnaire items had outer loading values more than 0.7, indicating that all constructs included in the first-order analysis have indicator reliability and that no items were left out of the model. However, the constructs' T-statistic values are extremely high (all over 1.96), indicating that the constructs are entirely significant at a 95% significance level.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of Constructs of First-Order Analysis.

Construct	Indicator reliability		Internal consistency reliability		Convergent validity
	Loading	t-statistics	CR	CA	AVE
1. Inter-personal norms					
1.1 Integrity			0.988	0.985	0.942
1) I have never had to wonder whether this person will stick to his/her word.	0.964	196.283			
2) This person has a strong sense of justice	0.973	282.259			
3) I believed that they were honest	0.968	305.632			
4) I'm sure that he always works honestly with me.	0.977	335.172			
5) I am sure that he will not violate any of the conspiracies that exist between us.	0.970	266.726			
1.2 Flexibility			0.987	0.983	0.951
1). In my dealings, it's very flexible in solving my problems with my business partner.	0.972	271.093			
2) In the face of various emergency situations, he willingly changes the terms we previously agreed to for my good.	0.973	265.778			
3) They do not hesitate to take into account my proposals and carry out important purchases and sales based on them.	0.977	314.300			

4). In the course of my changing behaviors, they will continue this partnership with a better understanding.	0.979	384.579			
1.3 Information Exchange			0.981	0.971	0.945
1). They provide me all the information that will help to make important decisions about this Joint Partner deals.	0.969	177.201			
2). Information are being shared early between us, before any events or changes that affect each party taken place.	0.979	420.363			
3) He will provide me with all the known knowledge of the risks or disadvantages that may affect me in future.	0.968	223.192			
1.4 Solidarity			0.988	0.985	0.945
1) Even if I had a debt that I owe him, he does not pay much attention to it in doing a new deal with me.	0.973	327.187			
2) We resolve the issues on transitions with amiability.	0.977	226.205			
3) He thinks that, it is his duty to carry out the agreement between us in the same manner as we agree.	0.967	286.588			
4) When I make decisions, he obeys them and works honestly with me.	0.970	300.326			
5) He thinks that they have to maintain long-term trading relationships between us.	0.971	284.850			
2. Transaction cost (mediator variable)					
2.1 Searching cost			0.971	0.956	0.919
1) We incur costs to search for new buyers and suppliers	0.941	92.917			
2) There is a labor cost to handle advertising activities	0.976	344.880			
3) There is a traveling cost to handle advertising activities	0.958	154.876			
2.2 Negotiation cost			0.982	0.973	0.948
1) There is a labor cost to handle legal matters and negotiate with exchange.	0.968	187.268			
2) There is travelling cost to handle legal matters	0.978	380.554			
3) There is Communication cost to handle legal matters and negotiate with exchange partners	0.975	260.945			
2.3 Monitoring cost			0.986	0.981	0.946
1) There is a Cost for monitoring the transaction activities whether they are undertaken according to the agreements	0.968	193.402			
2) There is a Labour cost for monitoring the transaction activities whether they are undertaken according to the agreements	0.983	435.523			
3) There is a Travelling cost for monitoring the transaction activities whether they are undertaken according to the agreements.	0.976	420.714			

4) There is a communication cost for monitoring the transaction activities whether they are undertaken according to the agreements	0.962	183.196			
2.4 Enforcement cost			0.984	0.979	0.940
1) There is a cost to resolve transaction disputes,	0.957	154.186			
2) There is a Labour cost to resolve transaction disputes	0.976	290.000			
3) There is a Travelling cost to resolve transaction disputes,	0.974	276.285			
4) There is a communication cost to resolve transaction disputes,	0.971	220.828			

Source: Survey Data, 2025.

Table 1 shows that the outer loading values of each indicator are above 0.7. This indicates that no questionnaire questions were left out of the model and that all generated outer loading values supported the indicator reliability under second-order analysis and at the 95% significance level, and this t-statistic value exhibits total significance and comparatively higher values. Therefore, this study confirmed the indicator reliability of constructs of questionnaires under second-order analysis. Further, all values of CA and CR of this study were greater than 0.9, showing greater internal consistency in the final model, representing a higher association between indicators and their variables in the model. Table 01 represents higher AVE values for the variables, which are greater than 0.8,

representing the convergent validity of all constructs of the questionnaire under second-order analysis.

The bolded figures in Table 2 represent the square root of AVE for each first order constructs of independent variables. Non-bold figures represent the other correlation values of the constructs. If non-bold values lying under the \sqrt{AVE} value in the table are lower compared to the manually calculated square root of AVE, the Discriminant validity of the constructs can be established ($\sqrt{AVE} > \text{Correlation of other variables}$). Accordingly, this study confirmed the discriminant validity of all constructs of independent variables under the first-order model, while all those indicators are significant at 99% significance level. ($\text{Sig.val} < 0.01$).

Table 2: Discriminant Validity of Constructs of First-Order Analysis.

	AVE	IPN-F	IPN-I	IPN-IE	IPN-S	TC EC	TC MC	TC NC	TC SC
Flexibility	0.951	0.975							
Integrity	0.942	0.927	0.970						
Information Exchange	0.945	0.943	0.906	0.972					
Solidarity	0.945	0.931	0.909	0.947	0.972				
Enforcement Cost	0.948	0.962	-0.773	0.962	-0.819	0.974			
Monitoring Cost	0.946	-0.780	-0.789	-0.775	-0.808	0.960	0.973		
Negotiation Cost	0.948	-0.801	-0.767	-0.765	-0.807	0.900	0.914	0.973	
Searching Cost	0.919	-0.788	-0.764	-0.760	-0.807	0.816	0.834	0.851	0.959

Source; Survey Data, (2025).

Second-order analysis: Second-order analysis looked at the relations among indicators and latent variables that correspond to construct reliability, including outer loading statistics (indicator reliability), composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency reliability). Convergent validity (AVE) and discriminant validity (Fornell-Lacker criterion), on the other hand, take into account the validity of conceptions.

more than 0.7. Further, these t-statistic values show full significance and comparatively greater values because all constructs' t-statistic values are greater than 1.96. At a 95% significance level. Moreover, this study checks the internal consistency and reliability for the main variables over the CA and CR. Accordingly, all values of CA and CR were greater than 0.9, showing greater internal consistency in the final model. AVE value is tested to confirm the Convergent validity, and it is recognized that all AVE values exceed 0.8, demonstrating the convergent validity of all questionnaire constructs under the second-order analysis.

Table 3 underlines that indicator reliability under second-order analysis as each indicator's outer loading values are

Table 3: Reliability and Validity of Constructs of Second-Order Analysis.

Construct	Loadings	t-statistic	CR	CA	AVE
1. Inter-personal norms			0.986	0.981	0.945
Integrity	0.962	82.060			

Flexibility	0.977	303.261			
Information Exchange	0.976	236.263			
Solidarity	0.974	220.022			
2. Transaction cost			0.976	0.967	0.910
Searching costs	0.957	72.684			
Negotiating costs	0.976	160.294			
Monitoring costs	0.974	236.663			
Enforcement costs	0.971	177.246			
4. Business Performance			0.981	0.977	0.879
I can earn an income that is enough for my better living and success from this business.	0.899	39.130			
I have the ability to buy high price commodity made it possible to earn more profits / profits.	0.903	68.998			
There are some important buyers and sellers around me.	0.946	116.159			
Due to business activities, my lands / buildings / vehicles ownerships have increased.	0.956	165.621			
My reputation has increased with this business.	0.937	96.717			
From this point onwards, I am pleased with the position in my business.	0.963	175.214			
	0.959	105.188			

Source; Survey Data, 2025.

Each latent variable's square root of AVE is utilized for establishing discriminant validity (Fornell, 1981). According to the concept, if \sqrt{AVE} is greater than the correlation values of

other variables, then the variables are said to have discriminant validity. In this second-order analysis, all of the AVE values' square roots exceed the other correlation values. Therefore, all variables are significant at the 0.05 significance level, and this study confirms discriminant validity under second-order analysis.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity of Constructs of Second-Order Analysis.

	BP	IPN	TC
BP	0.938		
IPN	0.924	0.972	
TC	-0.834	-0.847	0.954

Source; Survey Data, 2025.

Structural Model: The structural model mainly evaluates hypothesized causal relationships between exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) latent variables. This assessment will be done based on the five-step guidelines, such as 1) Collinearity test, 2) path coefficient analysis, 3). Coefficient of determination, 4). effect size, and 5). assess the predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014).

VIF values of 0.787 indicate less effect of multicollinearity between interpersonal norms and BP, whereas VIF values of 0.2729 indicate less effective multicollinearity between transaction cost and BP. This implies that the independent and dependent variables, as well as the mediating and dependent variables, are less multicollinear. Additionally, Table 5 shows that there is reduced multicollinearity across independent and mediating factors, with a VIF value of 4.731 between transaction cost and interpersonal norms.

Table 5: Multicollinearity Test of the Inner Model.

	BP		TC	
	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF
Inter-personal norms	0.3588	2.787	0.2113	4.731
Transaction cost	0.2729	3.664		

Source; Survey Data, 2025.

Additionally, this study's adjusted R^2 value for the BP was 90.3%. This figure indicates that the independent variable of relational contract accounts for 90.3% of the variation in the BP. Additionally, the study's adjusted R^2 value for transaction cost is 72.5%. This indicates that the study's independent variables account for 72.5% of the variation in transaction costs.

Also, this study's Table No. 6 found a small effect size (f^2) between interpersonal norms and BP of over 0.019, and a similar small effect size across interpersonal norms and transaction costs of 0.085.

Table 6: Value of the Effect Size of Variables.

	BP	Effect size (f ²)	TC	Effect size (f ²)
IPN	0.019	small	0.085	small
TC	0.034	medium		

Source; Survey Data, 2025.

Additionally, this study's Table No. 6 found a small effect size (f²) between interpersonal norms and BP of over 0.019, and a similar small effect size across interpersonal norms and transaction costs of 0.085.

There are four (4) hypotheses that are the focus of this study. The first three (3) hypotheses among them examine the direct impact of the connection between independent, dependent, and mediating variables, which has been proposed. The suggested connection is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Path Coefficient and T-Statistic Among Constructs.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient	t-statistic	P values	Decision
H1	Interpersonal Norms and Business Performance	0.155	2.250	0.024	Accepted
H2	Interpersonal Norms and Transaction Cost	-0.523	4.427	0.000	Accepted
H3	Transaction Cost and Business Performance	-0.109	2.723	0.006	Accepted
H4	IPN -> TC -> BP	0.057	2.129	0.033	Partial Mediation

Source; Survey Data, 2025.

DISCUSSION

The path coefficient value between interpersonal norms and business performance is +0.155, as shown in Table 7, indicating a positive correlation between the two. In other words, business performance increases by 0.155 units for each unit rise in relational norms. Furthermore, at a 95% significance level, the t-statistic value is 2.250, confirming the significance of this relationship. This suggests that the exchange of various levels of norms among retailers can significantly improve the performance of retail business operations. Therefore, H1, which states that interpersonal norms have a favorable effect on retail traders' business success, is supported by this study. Paulin et al. (1997) have empirically confirmed how relational norms affect business performance with supported and rewarded maintenance of effective relationships.

The negative correlation between transaction costs and interpersonal norms is also present in Table 7, showing a -0.523 β value and a 4.427 t-stat value at the 0.05 significance level. Priyanath, et al., (2016) and Rokkan et al. (2003) proved the negative association between norms and transaction costs through their studies. Parties are able to reduce the cost of the exchange with fair rules and standards they follow towards business partners through honest understanding, flexibility in decision-making, and sensitive attention towards other partners when partners fall into business trouble, which improves the effectiveness of the market (Bies et al., 2007; Chou & Ramser, 2021). Paulin et al. (1997) further reveal the importance of interpersonal norms for the reduction of transaction costs. Thus, researchers can clearly provide evidence for the H2 hypothesis based on this study.

Moreover, this study observed the negative relationship between transaction cost and business performance (the path coefficient value is -0.109). This underlines how business

performance improves once transaction costs decrease. This relationship is confirmed by a t-statistic value of 2.729, which corresponds to a 95% confidence level. Retailers can allocate scarce resource more effectively when transaction costs are lower, and this impact minimizes the unnecessary expenditure, boosting operational flexibility. Accordingly, minimizing transaction costs becomes a critical factor in sustaining competitive advantage and improving profitability. These findings validate H3, which posits that transaction costs negatively influence business performance.

The last hypothesis of this study is the H4 hypothesis, which supports another indirect and mediating impact of transaction cost on the relationship between interpersonal norms and BP. Norms are another key indicator that shows a negative relationship with transaction cost; therefore, a positive relationship represents the performance of the organization. This idea is disclosed by former researchers such as Achrol and Gundlach (1999), Doucette (1996), and Paswan and Young (1999), who explain how the performance of the organization can maximize cost over minimizing cost and how norms contribute to maximizing performance through the transaction cost concept. Whenever economic activities among the exchange parties are filled with norms, fair rules, and diverse standards, the organization automatically makes a bridge, bringing various pools of resources and profits (Rus & Igljč, 2005). Further, Williamson (1996) expressed that organizations can enhance cooperation and opportunities for mutual gains over the indirect effects of trust and norms, reducing transaction costs, and governance mechanisms (Williamson, 1996) act as an effective mechanism to keep organizational transactions running smoothly. Therefore, empirical evidence proves the hypothesis developed by H4 in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated how interpersonal norms significantly improve business performance and reduce the transaction costs of the retail traders with special reference to the Gampaha district. Four hypotheses were tested employing PLS-SEM, and the results revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance. The second hypothesis revealed that there is a negative relationship between interpersonal norms and transaction costs. Further, these findings showed how transaction cost negatively influences on business performance, while it finally confirmed the mediating role of transaction cost in the relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance. These conclusions align with relational contract theory, suggesting that shared norms are essential for minimizing uncertainty and boosting efficiency in retail traders. Retail traders who are involved in constructing strong interpersonal networks can expect not only upgraded collaboration but also concrete economic benefits through cost reduction and performance enhancement. Thus, this study supports the new theoretical framework over the multidisciplinary approach among economics, sociology, and managerial theories. Thus, this current study provides a preliminary understanding of how interpersonal norms, as a social dimension, affect transaction costs and the business performance of the organization while evaluating how to mediate the role of the transaction cost effect on the relationship between interpersonal norms and business performance, minimizing the empirical gap by addressing retailers in the Gampaha district, Sri Lanka.

However, the evidence here is that across a broad range of different buyers' and suppliers' relationships, gaining the trust and norms of opposite exchange parties is the key element in their participation in cooperative business activities, as well as for long-term better business interactions to a greater extent. Constructs of the transaction cost, which is evidence about the impact of characteristics of a strong relational bond between two parties on the BP, play a mediating role between interpersonal norms and transaction cost. Further, they demonstrate that they are fair and honest and work with solidarity at all times, and they express that they are likely to share knowledge with their business partners. These qualities of business partners result in a higher level of income, maintaining the performance of the business. Finally, SL is one of the developing countries in the world market, and the majority of retail traders have no legal boundaries to secure their transactions and cannot spend to gain the popularity of the business. Thus, the development of social attitudes towards business enhancement would be the most appropriate method for SL to maximize profit while minimizing transaction costs. Retail traders can form formal business associations to share information and have flexible agreements with each other to earn a profit. Further, the government should regulate policies to provide an ideal and peaceful environment with better progress in the country. Through the growth of decent social attitudes without being heavily based on price mechanisms and laws. Such a concept can greatly reduce the large amount of legal expenses associated with the transaction, giving businesses a new outlook for sound performance. Accordingly, it is recommended that this kind of local business association benefits from developing reliable associations with different exchange partners, and it creates a bridge to share business information with others.

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Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (SLJSSH)

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Belihuloya, 70140, Sri Lanka. <https://www.sab.ac.lk/sljssh>

Journal Guidelines – SLJSSH

1. INTRODUCTION

This guideline outlines the essential processes and policies for managing a journal indexed in major academic databases. It provides a detailed framework for authors, reviewers, and editors to ensure scientific rigor, ethical compliance, and seamless publication workflows.

The Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (SLJSSH) to provide the national and international scholars with an intellectual platform for the publication of a quality journal (Link: <https://www.sab.ac.lk/sljssh/>). This multi-disciplinary bi-annual international journal in English aims to promote studies in Social Sciences and Humanities and thereby cater to the needs of all researchers and academics looking forward to contributing their knowledge, skills, and abilities to the field of Social Sciences and Humanities.

Each submission to SLJSSH undergoes a rigorous double-blind peer-review process to ensure the highest quality. The Editorial Board thoroughly reviews all submissions to uphold the journal's standards. As a cited journal in the Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) database, SLJSSH has seen steady growth in readership, submissions, and citations. (Link: <https://sljssh.sljol.info/>) This reflects our commitment to impactful research. Manuscripts written in English languages is only accepted. The manuscripts should be original and not submitted elsewhere for publication.

2. SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Title Page: The title page is a separate page before the text. It should include the following information:

Authors' Names and Affiliations

Indicate the initials and then the last name. Present the authors' affiliation addresses (where the actual work was done) below the names. Indicate all affiliations with a lower-case superscript letter immediately after the author's name and in front of the appropriate address. Provide the full postal address of each affiliation, including the country name and the e-mail address of each author.

Corresponding Author

Indicate who is willing to handle correspondence at all stages of refereeing, publication, and also post-publication. Ensure that telephone numbers (with country and area code) are provided in addition to the e-mail address and the complete postal address.

2.1 Types of Submission

A. Research Papers

- Original research with reasonable novelty.
- Must contribute to existing knowledge with clear objectives and methodology.
- **Language:** The language of the manuscript must be English (British standard). Authors are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the language in their manuscripts. Poor language quality, including grammatical errors and unclear phrasing, may lead to rejection. High language standards are essential for clear communication and professionalism. To improve language quality, authors are strongly encouraged to have their manuscripts professionally proofread, especially if they are non-native English speakers. Submissions should adhere to the journal's formatting and style guidelines, ensuring clear, concise, and formal academic writing. Proper proofreading prior to submission helps enhance readability and ensures a smoother review process, ultimately improving the chances of acceptance for publication.
- Maximum word count limits: (including a list of references and annexures): 6,000-10,000 words
- Structured format
 1. Title, List of authors together with affiliations
 2. Abstract (maximum of 250 words)
 3. Keywords - Minimum 3 and maximum of 5 keywords, in alphabetical order
 4. Introduction
 5. Literature Review
 6. Materials & Methods
 7. Results & Discussion
 8. Conclusion
 9. Acknowledgments (optional)
 10. References
 11. Annexures (optional)

Detailed Description of the above structure is given below.

Title: The title should be concise and informative. Abbreviations and formulae should be avoided where possible.

Abstract: A concise and factual abstract is required (maximum length of 250 words). The abstract should state briefly the purpose of the research, methodology, the principal results, and major conclusions. An abstract is often presented separately from the article, so it must be able to stand alone. References should be avoided in the abstract.

Keywords: Immediately after the abstract, a maximum of 5 keywords, avoiding general and plural terms and multiple concepts (avoid, for example, 'and', 'of') should be provided. Keywords should be presented. The keyword should be arranged in alphabetical order.

Introduction: This section should be concise, with no subheadings, and provide a background to the research problem, present the research problem with sufficient justification and objective/s.

Literature Review: This section should provide a sufficient evaluation of theoretical/empirical/methodological literature to identify knowledge gaps.

Materials and Methods: This section should contain adequate detailed information about what all the procedures and steps followed (including nature of data, sampling, analytical methods).

Results and Discussion: This section should be described on the results and outputs of the research work and the results should be discussed with previous studies and the present context.

Conclusions: Conclusions should clearly explain the findings for the research objectives, knowledge contribution (novelty), implications, limitations and the future research directions with no subheadings.

Subdivision of the Article: Subheadings/sections should not be numbered and allowed only the below mention three types of subheadings. Subsections should be highlighted as follows (Refer Table 1 given below)

Table and Figures: Present tables and figures within the article, not at the end of the article. Tables should be numbered consecutively using Arabic numbering (Table 1, Table 2, etc.) and must have corresponding references in the main text. Tables should also have appropriate and concise headings and table source below the table.

Acknowledgments: If the research is sponsored or supported by an organization please indicate it within 50 words. (Ex: Financial sponsorships, data provision).

Reference: Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (SLJSSH) uses the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide (the latest) for both in-text citations and reference lists. References should be arranged alphabetically. More than one reference from the same author(s) in the same year must be identified by the letters "a", "b", "c", etc., placed after the year of publication.

B. Review Papers

- Comprehensive synthesis of existing research
- **Language:** The language of the manuscript must be English (British standard). Authors are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the language in their manuscripts. Poor language quality, including grammatical errors and unclear phrasing, may lead to rejection. High language standards are essential for clear communication and professionalism. To improve language quality, authors are strongly encouraged to have their manuscripts professionally proofread, especially if they are non-native English speakers. Submissions should adhere to the journal's formatting and style guidelines, ensuring clear, concise, and formal academic writing. Proper proofreading prior to submission helps enhance readability and ensures a smoother review process, ultimately improving the chances of acceptance for publication.
- Maximum word count limits: (including a list of references and annexures): 5,000-8,000 words
- Structured format
 1. Title, List of authors together with affiliations
 2. Abstract
 3. Keywords
 4. Introduction
 5. Review Methodology
 6. Thematic Discussions
 7. Conclusion and Future Research
 8. References

The detailed Description of the structure is given below.

Title: The title should be concise and informative. Abbreviations and formulae should be avoided where possible.

Abstract: A concise and factual abstract is required (maximum length of 250 words). The abstract should state briefly the purpose of the research, methodology, the principal results, and major conclusions. An abstract is often presented separately from the article, so it must be able to stand alone. References should be avoided in the abstract.

Keywords: Immediately after the abstract, a maximum of 5 keywords, avoiding general and plural terms and multiple concepts (avoid, for example, 'and', 'of') should be provided. Keywords should be presented. The keyword should be arranged in alphabetical order.

Introduction: This section should be concise, with no subheadings, and provide a background to the research problem, present the research problem with sufficient justification and objective/s

Review Methodology: Details the systematic approach used for selecting, analyzing, and synthesizing existing literature. It includes search strategies, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and data sources.

Results and Discussions: Presents synthesized findings from the reviewed literature, followed by an interpretation of these results. This section links outcomes to the research objectives, critically analyzing trends, contradictions, and implications. It emphasizes the study's contributions and situates them within broader academic or practical contexts.

Conclusions: Conclusions should clearly explain the findings for the research objectives, knowledge contribution (novelty), implications, limitations and the future research directions with no subheadings.

Reference: Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (SLJSSH) uses the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide (the latest) for both in-text citations and reference lists. References should be arranged alphabetically. More than one reference from the same author(s) in the same year must be identified by the letters "a", "b", "c", etc., placed after the year of publication.

2.2 Submission Requirements

- Clear and concise abstract with Keywords
- Adherence to the journal's formatting and citation style
- Authors' ORCID IDs and affiliations
- Conflict of interest statement and Declaration of originality

2.3 Manuscript Formatting

- Microsoft Word is the preferred word processor for articles/papers.
- Authors are strongly encouraged to use standard international units of measurement wherever it applies and to use MS Word equation editor to write iconic species and mathematical equations.

- **General Guidelines**

Font	Times New Roman	
Space	1.5	
Font size	12	
Alignment	Justify	
Margins	Normal margins (Top 1", Bottom 1", Left 1" and Right 1")	
Subdivision of the Article	Subheadings/sections should not be numbered and allowed only the below mention 3 types of subheadings	
	Main Headings	Divide your article into clearly defined main sections (as Introduction, Literature Review, Materials & Methods, Results & Discussion, and Conclusion). Capital Letters, 12 front and Bold. The text should be started below the main heading
	Second-level subheadings	Simple letters (Capitalized each word), 12 front and Bold. The text should be started below the heading
	Third level subheadings	Simple letters (Capitalized each word), 12 front and Bold. The text should be started in the same line after the heading. (Example, Third Level Subheadings: Text should be started in the same line after the heading)
Table and	Present tables and figures within the article, not at the end of the article. Tables should be numbered consecutively using Arabic numbering (Table 1, Table 2, etc.) and must have corresponding references in the main text. Tables should also have appropriate and concise headings and table source below the table	
Figures	All figures and illustrations, as in the case of tables, should be numbered consecutively as 'Figures' (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.) with corresponding references in the main text. Figures should also have appropriate and concise headings and figure source below the table	
Abbreviations	The details of the abbreviation should be given when it appears first	
Reference	American Psychological Association (APA) style (the latest)	

Table 1: General Guidelines

- **Tables and Figures**

- Number sequentially
- Include descriptive captions
- Use high-resolution images (300 DPI minimum)

- Sources must be credited appropriately. For the tables and figures developed by the author, sources should be given with the year (Ex: Source: Developed by Author, 2025).
- **Generative AI Usage**
 - Authors must disclose the use of AI tools in the methodology or acknowledgement.

2.4 CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

- **Scientific Rigor** (Research must be backed by robust methodology and data analysis, Clear and concise presentation of findings)
- **Reasonable Novelty** (Emphasis on original contributions to the field)
- **Rich Metadata** (Title, abstract, and keywords must be detailed and informative, Structured abstracts with objectives, methods, results, and conclusions)
- **Ethical Compliance** (Adherence to ethical standards in research and publication)

3. GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS, REVIEWERS, AND EDITORS

3.1 Author Instructions

3.1.1 Manuscript Preparation

- For further details see the section 2.3. *Manuscript formatting*
- **Ethical Compliance:**
 - Authors must confirm adherence to ethical research practices, including human rights and data integrity
 - Disclose any conflicts of interest

3.1.2 Submission Process

- **Submission of the Paper:** The author should submit the paper via e-mail to the chief editor at sljoss@ssl.sab.ac.lk. The submitted manuscript is acknowledged within one week upon receipt.
- Articles can be submitted at any time and accepted articles will be published in the following issue once the entire review process is completed.
- Submissions should not have been published earlier or be under consideration for publication while being evaluated for this Journal.
- Before submitting the manuscript, the author(s) should check the following list.
 - The submission has not been previously published or considered for publication as its part or a full paper.

Special Note: Authors submitting papers based on abstracts presented at conferences organized by Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka are allowed to submit their full papers to the journal but they must clearly disclose this during submission in the Acknowledgement. The manuscript should provide substantial expansion beyond the original abstract. As there are no copyright issues within the institution, authors must ensure proper citation of the conference abstract. The paper will undergo the journal's standard peer review

process. Authors should confirm that the expanded paper meets the journal's academic standards and ethical guidelines for originality and quality.

- The submission file is in Microsoft Word format.
- Manuscript has been made in light of the Journal's author guidelines.
- Author(s) has not mentioned his or her name and affiliation in the main text.
- Author(s) has read all the terms and conditions of the journal.
- Plagiarism (In-text similarity) is allowed only 20%.
- Copyright Form.
- Note that SLJSSH does not charge any submission, processing, or publication fees.
- In the case of multiple authors, the submitting author, who is generally the corresponding author, is responsible for the manuscript during the submission and peer review process.