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Research Centre for Governance and Public Policy
Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce University of
Sri Jayewardenepura
Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

Tel: (+94) 112802006

Email: ijgppa@sjp.ac.lk

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Organizational Value Nexus and Espoused-Enacted Value Interplay: The Case of Sri Lankan Public Administration

Yashoda Bandara

Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka
yashoda@mgt.rjt.ac.lk

Kumudinei Dissanayake

University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
kumudisa@mos.cmb.ac.lk

Arosha S. Adikaram

University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
arosha@hrm.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract

The role of public value conflicts in public failure has been examined from a human and normative viewpoint, beyond commonly discussed economic concerns. Although the country's public sector is frequently criticized for its poor performance and value-related issues, very little research has been conducted in the Sri Lankan context in this regard. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how espoused and enacted organizational values interact in Sri Lankan public administration. This study employs a qualitative case study research approach within the broader philosophical premise of interpretivism. Accordingly, data were acquired from top-level managers of the Sri Lankan public administrative organization through in-depth, in-person, semi-structured interviews and core regulatory documents. Thematic analysis was conducted by coding and classifying the data to generate themes. Two main categories emerged from the analysis: espoused and enacted. The organization's primary stated values, public interest, service boundless, good governance, and humanity and morality came to light as being distorted to some extent by personal interests, subordination and dependency, distrust, inactivity, and apathy in its day-to-day operations. The findings of this study provide fresh insights into existing knowledge on how the interplay of espoused – enacted values in public administration leads to public failures. Further, the study provides managerial implications that would aid public policymakers in the creation of practical plans for the alignment of public administration with the country's setting while keeping its avowed ideals.

Keywords: Enacted Values, Espoused Values, Public Administration, Public Value Conflicts, Sri Lanka, Value Congruence

1. Introduction

Public administration, as a visible facet of government (Wilson, 1953), is significant within a country's social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. However, criticism over administrative efficacy and failures to uphold core public values, seen as a distinctive aspect of 'public failure' (Bozeman, 2002; Bozeman & Sarewitz, 2005) has seriously intensified in the past few decades. This is evidenced by issues such as corruption (Haque, 2001; Maesschalck, 2004; Hellsten & Labri, 2006), democratic erosion, legitimacy loss (Adams & Balfour, 2008), value decline (De Vries & Kim, 2011), and ethical lapses (Maesschalck, 2004), which transcend national boundaries and extend to both developing (Haque, 2001; Gow, 2005) and developed countries (Hellsten & Labri, 2006; Adams & Balfour, 2008). In addition to the economic focus on public values (Moore, 1995), when viewed from a human perspective (Bozeman, 2007), conflicting public values remain a commonly identified phenomenon among the various reasons for public failures (Van der Wal et al., 2015; Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Rhodes & Wanna, 2007). Acknowledging the multiplicity of conflicting values (Oldenhof et al., 2014), public value conflicts have often been viewed from a broader perspective, leading to generic discussions.

From a normative human perspective, values are defined as explicit or implicit conceptions or enduring beliefs that lead to the selection of specific modes, means, and ends of actions and conduct (Kluckhohn, 1951; Rockeach, 1973) where Value incongruence occurs when different value systems conflict with each other (Edwards & Cable, 2009). The concept of value incongruence, widely discussed in organizational studies, provides a strong basis for explaining value conflicts within public administrative contexts. One form of this conflict, the misalignment between espoused [declared ideal values (Daly et al., 2004; Di Lauro et al., 2023; Schein, 1990)] and enacted values [manifested actual values (Ehrhart, Schneider & Macey, 2014)], has long been theorized (Agryris & Shon, 1974), as a cause of adverse outcomes such as high turnover, low job satisfaction, and organizational cynicism (Chen & Liang, 2023; Edwards & Cable, 2009; Kristof- Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Schneider, 1987; Vveinhardt & Foktas, 2023). The concept of value congruence serves as a valuable tool for analyzing value gaps among stakeholders in the field of management and organization studies. It offers a solid foundation for moving beyond generic discussions of value conflicts, and provides specific insights into their nature, causes, and consequences. However, although a few studies (e.g., Jensen et al., 2018; Jung, 2017; van Thiel & van der Wal, 2008; Zhong & Bao, 2018),

the use of the concept of value congruence to operationalize value conflicts in the realm of public administration remains relatively limited, despite the potential for employing innovative methodological approaches to make more robust claims in the realm of public values and value conflicts (van der Wal, 2016).

As a developing country with a public administrative organization established on colonial roots (Kannangara, 1966; Somasundaram, 2007), Sri Lanka is also said to be in the misery of value conflict in the public sector (Warnapala, 2013; Priyantha et al., 2019; Somasundaram, 2007; Weeramanthri, 2005). Despite the understanding that reforms and structural changes cannot only improve the governance quality of the Sri Lankan public sector (Ramasamy, 2020), no empirical studies have been conducted to explore and explain it adequately. Although the need to match the public sector to the country's socio-cultural context and the needs of the people is strongly highlighted (De Silva, 2010; Warnapala, 2013); a comprehensive understanding of prevailing values or value gaps in the Sri Lankan Public Administrative Organization (SLPAO) is still lacking, where neither the espoused values nor the enacted values of the SLPAO have been clearly identified. This background highlights the prevalence of a knowledge gap that is yet to be filled through a precise understanding of public value gaps from a normative perspective.

The extant literature suggests that understanding employees' values and their impact on behavior can assist managers in adopting appropriate management practices that ensure desired behavioral and performance outcomes (Chandrakumara, 2011; Torreset al., 2022). Indeed, congruence between societal values and managerial practices has a critical influence on organizational outcomes (Erez, 1988; Trevino et al., 2020). Thus, understanding the specific aspects of value incongruence is crucial for formulating strategies to mitigate value conflicts and to promote better strategic alignment (Nielson et al., 2019). However, this understanding is lacking in the context of SLPAO. Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the main research question of how the highest tier of management in SLPAO perceives the espoused-enacted value interaction within the organization, establishing its aim to explore the dynamic interaction between espoused and enacted values within the SLPAO through the perceptions of top-level managers to identify any potential disparities.

Accordingly, this study contributes to the existing literature by extending the concept of value congruence to the field of public administration while identifying the incongruence between espoused and enacted values in the selected empirical setting. This provides solid empirical evidence regarding the nature of value conflict in SLPAO from a normative perspective, which remains an unfilled need (Liyanage,

2019; Weeramanthri, 2005; Warnapala, 2013). Given the context of a formerly colonized and developing nation, the findings may offer insights applicable to similar settings. Additionally, the study fulfills the need for more foundational data on unique public value priorities in this context (Van der Wal, 2016; Fukumoto & Bozeman, 2019), while adopting a normative 'public value perspective' (Jorgensen & Rutgers, 2015).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, the existing literature on the nature and possible differences between espoused and enacted values is discussed, with the support of relevant empirical and theoretical explanations. Next, the research context is explained, highlighting performance gaps. Thereafter, the findings reveal the incongruence between espoused and enacted values in the Sri Lankan context, followed by a discussion. The paper ends with conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Interplay Between Espoused and Enacted Values

Espoused values have been identified as articulated and promoted by the top or senior management of an organization (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Schein, 1985) with the aim of supporting the achievement of organizational goals and strategies (Bansal, 2003; Neher, Wong, & Miles, 2022; Williams, 2010). Explains it as conscious representations of the strategies, goals, and philosophies of the organization, which are differentiated from the basic underlying values that exist largely at the unconscious level, represented by enacted values. Espoused values are articulated, publicly expressed, and professed on behalf of the organization by senior managers, which guide employee behavior to support organizational strategies and goals (Diskiene & Gostautas, 2010; Neher et al., 2022; Daly et al., 2004; Schein, 1990; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner, 1994). Thus, the espoused values of an organization encompass those articulated and promoted by top or senior management as a conscious representation of the strategic intentions and philosophies of the organization.

Enacted values, in contrast to espoused values, are the values and norms demonstrated through the actions of individuals within the organization (Ehrhart et al., 2014) and guide employee behavior (Senge et al., 1994). Enacted values emerge from the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of organizational members that are deeply embedded in organizational culture (Schein, 1985). The enacted values of an organization can be traced through statements made

by the people within the organization (Kuh & Whitt, 1988) and observations of employee behavior (Gerson & Horowitz, 2022), where the enacted values of an organization can be captured through perceptions (Gruys et al., 2008; Eisenbeiss et al., 2015; Liedtka, 1989), especially from CEOs (Cotton, Stevenson, & Bartunek, 2016).

Unlike espoused values, enacted values are influenced by employees' social desirability biases and impressions of management priorities (Siehl & Martin, 1990) and apparently communicated through the actions of the organization (Ehrhart et al., 2014). Accordingly, the values embedded in the organization and guide members' explicit behaviors through unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, can be identified as enacted values.

Given the fundamental difference in the nature of espoused and enacted values, the gap between these values has received substantial attention in scholarly discussion. Argyris and Schon, (1974) introduced the concept of the gap between espoused and enacted values in the Theory of Action, suggesting that individuals may hold explicit beliefs about their actions (Espoused Values) that may differ from their actual behavior (Enacted Values) in the Theory of Action. Subsequent literature has widely adopted this understanding to differentiate between stated values and observed actions, even extending it to the organizational level beyond the individual level and across different contexts (Dolan, 2011; Gray, Smart & Bennett, 2017). According to Dolan (2011) values are expressed either verbally or in writing but are not consistently embodied or realized in action. Ehrhart et al. (2014) suggest that espoused values, or the values stated by management, may not always align with those demonstrated in organizational actions, implying that espoused values may not necessarily be values that are in use or enacted.

Upon this ground it is clear that the possible gap between espoused and enacted values varies across different contexts in accordance with the specific values articulated and demonstrated in each context. However, no such evaluation of public value gaps has been reported concerning the SLPAO context from a normative perspective, highlighting a clear dearth of context-specific knowledge on espoused- enacted value (in)congruence observed in the selected research context.

2.2 Sri Lankan Public Administration and Its Value Dilemma

Sri Lanka is a developing country in South Asia with a GDP of 77.1 billion USD and per capita gross national income of 3,388 USD in 2022 (Central Bank, 2023), it records a high score in the Human Development Index, which is located in 78th place among the 193 countries and territories of the world (UN Human Development Report, 2023/24). Historically, Sri Lanka operated under indigenous systems of public administration for centuries before becoming a colony known as ‘Ceylon’ belonged to Western crowns in 16th century. Following the Portuguese and Dutch periods, which partly ruled the island, British governance prevailed until 1948. Thus, the origins of SLPAO can be traced back to the establishment of the Ceylon Civil Service under the Crown Colony Rule in 1801 (Kannangara, 1966; Silva, 2006). Despite the various reforms introduced to the system of public administration of the country after independence, the fundamentals of the system have been observed to have a high resemblance to the British system (Oberst, 1986; Priyantha et al., 2019).

The Sri Lankan public sector currently employs a significant portion of the country's workforce, amounting to 15.1 percent of the total workforce by 2022 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2022), with approximately one public employee per 15 citizens. As mentioned in the budget speech 2024, 35 percent of the government's revenue is spent on paying salaries for public servants (Budget Speech - 2024, 2023). The persistent rise in government expenditure on the public sector is also evident in 16.1 percent increment in the nominal wage rate compared with the previous year (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022).

Despite significant investments and attempts to enhance the quality of its performance, the country's public sector is often questioned due to inefficiency, poor governance quality, limited competencies, politicization, extreme bureaucracy, nepotism, corruption (Ramasamy, 2020; Liyanage et al., 2018; Dilsahni, 2022; Transparency International, 2019), strikes and work stoppages, tardiness, absenteeism, lack of accountability (ILO, 2022), unethical practices (Fernando, 2009; de Alwis, 2010), and the observance of power politics (Samarathunga & Benington, 2002; Nanayakkara, 2015), which hinders the overall productivity of the country's economy. This situation has been viewed as a result of the outdated model of the country's public sector, which proves to be highly counterproductive and rigid in transferring value to final customers and the poor performance of employees, making the expenditure for public sector wages unproductive spending (Amarasinghe, 2009; Nafeel, 2014).

Seminal authors in the field of Sri Lankan public administration have discussed this issue in depth, focusing on the factors contributing to this performance imbalance.

Accordingly, deterioration of the effectiveness of the public sector has been strongly attributed to the disappearance of certain values from the system (Warnapala, 2013) for various reasons, such as negative political interference (Root et al., 2001; Iqbal, 2002; Warnapala, 2013) and the unethical behavior of its human resources (Fernando, 2009). Most importantly, the lack of ethical norms and values has been identified as a contributing factor that creates a gap in the capability of Sri Lankan public services (de Alwis, 2010). Thus, failure of the existing formal systems, structures, rules, regulations, and procedures established in the public sector to regulate the behavior of its members towards effectiveness indicates that the present performance dilemma emerges at a void located at a deeper level of human behavioral drivers, which is broadly related to values (Bandara, Dissanayake & Adikaram, 2023). Somasundaram (1997) argues that public administration, which had been at the forefront of weaving various strands to form a society, had the task of retaining the best of the concepts that prevailed and engineering fresh values to fit emerging realities.

3. Methodology

This study examines SLPAO in a holistic view, focusing on organizational values as collective constructs in a qualitative investigation. Data were gathered through interviews with key informants and regulatory documents to ensure construct validity. Given that top management typically articulates espoused values (Kabanof & Daly, 2002) and observes enacted values (Cotton et al., 2017), SLPAO top-level managers were purposively selected as key informants. Accordingly, (14) top-level managers from the highest tiers of management were key informants, whose service experience ranged from 11 to 33 years. The number did not further increase as the data indicated saturation, and the number was within the range of the most suitable size for a qualitative study employing in-depth interviews (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006) with a strong dialog in the case (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2015). The sample profiles are listed in Table 01.

Table 01: Sample Profile of the Key Informants

Key informant	Pseudonym	Level in the top management	Service experience (years)
Key Informant 1	KI 1	I	33
Key Informant 2	KI 2	I	33
Key Informant 3	KI 3	I	32
Key Informant 4	KI 4	II	33
Key Informant 5	KI 5	II	32
Key Informant 6	KI 6	II	27
Key Informant 7	KI 7	II	28

Key Informant 8	KI 8	II	15
Key Informant 9	KI 9	III	17
Key Informant 10	KI 10	III	17
Key Informant 11	KI 11	III	15
Key Informant 12	KI 12	III	14
Key Informant 13	KI 13	III	14
Key Informant 14	KI 14	III	11

Source: Field Data

Interviews were conducted using a structured guide, seeking the expressions of informants regarding the underlying values that are believed to be the ideals espoused by the organization and the actual values in use. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Additionally, organizational regulatory documents, widely recognized as valuable sources for identifying values (Martin and Siehl, 1983; Rousseau, 1990; Kabanoff, 1996; Kabanoff & Daly, 2002; Daly et al., 2004; Kabanoff & Holt, 1996), such as the Establishment Code, Financial Regulations, Code of Ethics, and Chapter III of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, were also considered to obtain relevant data. Data from both sources underwent separate thematic analysis, adhering to established reliability protocols (Braun & Clark, 2006), with slight adjustments to suit the study's objectives. Interviews, recorded as audio files, were transcribed into MS Word format to ensure accuracy through cross-referencing with original recordings. The initial coding process identified broad response categories and refined them to uncover distinct themes. Two primary categories (espoused and enacted values) emerged initially, with subsequent coding rounds incorporating existing and new codes to capture evolving insights. The resultant codes, categories, and themes were organized into tables for clarity. Feedback from informants ensured credibility through member checking and peer debriefing (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), with suggested additions incorporated into the analysis.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study in three main areas: the incongruence between the espoused and enacted values of the organization, the reasons underlying such incongruence, and possible outcomes.

4.1 Incongruence of Espoused and Enacted Values

Public interest, service obligation, good governance, humanity, and morality were recognized as the organization's core espoused values. Table 02 presents the codes and

categories through which these values were thematized. However, the organization's enacted values often diverged from these espoused values, showing tendencies towards personal interest, submission, distrust, and passivity, as explained below.

Table 02: Thematizing of Espoused and Enacted Values

Theme	Category	Codes
<i>Espoused values</i>		
Public interest	Public interest	Public focus; Priority to public needs and interests; People centric; Concern on public funds; Empowerment of people
Service boundedness	Service obligation	Service orientation; Obligation to serve; Customer satisfaction; Service quality, responsibility
	Duty consciousness	Duty consciousness; Commitment; Hardworking
	Loyalty	Loyalty to the State; loyalty to the public service;
	Thriftiness	Thriftiness; Accountability
Good governance	Formality and order	Working within formalities, structures and predefined procedures; Conformity with rules Consistency
	Efficiency	Discipline; Seniority and service categories Quick and accurate responses; Productivity; Result-oriented decisions and conduct
	Effectiveness	Effectiveness; Rationality and logic; Strategic thinking; Tactfulness; Holistic integration, Clear and strong vision; Sustainability
	Independence	Un-biasedness/autonomy; Straight forwardness; Independence and autonomy; Political neutrality
	Expertise	Competencies and skillfulness; Skillfulness; Vast exposure; Knowledge and awareness
Humanity and morality	Humanity and morality	Friendliness; Consideration; Politeness; Hospitality; Humanism; Mutual respect; Moral obligations; Morality and ethics; Collectiveness; Cooperation;
	Lawfulness and righteousness	Lawfulness; Righteousness; Good personal conduct
	Integrity	Honesty; Genuineness; Trustworthiness
	Fairness and justice	Fairness and justice; Impartiality; Participation and democracy; No discrimination
<i>Enacted values</i>		
Personal interest	Lack of concern on public interest	No worries about public funds, not thinking of true needs of the public, Lack of personal concern, Just follow politicized decisions, Poor enforcement of people, Lack of thriftiness

	Poor concern on Humanity and morality	Pride and status gaps, Negligence of moral and ethical standards, Selfishness
	Lack of concern on employees	Rigid systems of handling grievances, uneven opportunities for personal growth, Salary anomalies and insufficiencies
Submission and dependence	Dependence	Reluctance to exercise autonomy, Hesitant responses, Submission to political influences
Distrust	Prejudice and poor reasonability	Unjust and unfair decisions and actions, Partiality and biases, Top to bottom decisions, Service/ gender discrimination
	Faithless to true intentions	No psychological bond, Lack of true involvement to safeguard the ultimate intentions
	Lack of integrity	Dishonesty, Not trustworthy and dependable, Hiding/ avoid disclosing information
Passivity and indifference	Poor service boundedness	Passivity and unwillingness, Not obligated, Not taking responsibility, Poor accountability
	Lack of formality and order	Blind adherence to rules, Discipline violations, Delays and leniency of law enforcement, Biases, Complex structures
	Inefficiency	Delays of responses and reactions, Unproductive work, No concern on results, No targets, Lengthy and complex processes, Less follow-up
	Ineffectiveness	Irrational decisions and actions, Lack of creativity and innovativeness, No strategic/ long term policies, Less attention on sustainability, High rigidity, System distractions, Negative attitudes, Absence of exemplary leadership
	Duty consciousness	Omission tendency, Lethargic & excuse seeking, Negligence and carelessness, Lack of prominence to duty
	Lack of expertise and exposure	Lack of skills and competencies, Lack of awareness, Lack of experience

Source: Based on the Field Data

4.2 Public Interest Vs. Personal Interests

Regulatory documents emphasize public interest as a primary objective, albeit indirectly. For example, Chapter III of the constitution enables the public to challenge executive or administrative actions that violate fundamental rights. Similarly, Financial Regulations aim to prevent the mismanagement of public funds, while provisions in the Establishment Code ensure proper service delivery and discourage

personal interests among public officers (Section 2.5.1, E-Code). Specific guidelines instruct officers to use resources economically, prevent waste, protect government property, report fraud or corruption (Section 2.7, E-Code), and maximize government benefits through competitive procurement processes (Section 3.2, Establishment Code).

Key informants highlighted the organization's primary focus on upholding public interests and empowerment but expressed dissatisfaction with the prevalence of personal interests driving employee behavior. KI 1: The most senior member of the top management of the organization noted:

“In general operations, the foremost concern is public interest. For every decision and action, this should be the ultimate guidance. It underlies all the operations like an invisible thread. It is the golden rule of public service.”

However, sometimes, the public interest seems to be left unattended in the functioning of the organization. Comparing the prevailing condition with the organization's intention to uphold the public interest, KI 3 further mentioned:

“We should think of the convenience of the public rather than the ease of officers. We should entertain easy access methods like technology-based open communication service delivery mechanisms to facilitate them. However, it is pathetic to see sometimes officers do not think of the true needs of the public. Some of them are more interested in their own convenience rather than catering the true needs of the society.”

It has been observed that enacted conditions of espoused values sometimes show very little concern for public funds or the true needs of the public. For example, KI 8 was added:

“It is really unfortunate to see how the public funds are going in vain sometimes. With incompetent and biased decisions an immense damage happens to public funds as well as to the expectations of the service.”

Many employees are said to have poor personal commitment to work for the public interest or to empower members of the public for convenient services and more benefits. Instead, they prioritize politically influenced decisions, regardless of their effectiveness. Selfishness, pride and status gaps, and negligence of moral and ethical standards further illustrate this focus on personal interest in public welfare. For instance, KI 12 elaborated on this issue:

“With the increasing concerns of money and wealth, ethics are rapidly deteriorating from the work culture. Officers tend to make decisions giving priority to earnings rather than ethical or moral concerns. For example, in transfers, some officers prefer workstations where they can earn money either legally or illegally.”

Key informants expressed concerns about public officers' lack of empathy while highlighting how certain officers exploit natural disasters such as floods for personal gain, contrary to the organization's expectations. Therefore, in light of the above, conflict between public and personal interests can be seen in the contemporary public sector. Despite the organization's espoused value of prioritizing public interest, enacted practices reveal a preference for personal interests over public welfare.

4.3 Service Boundedness Vs. Passivity and Indifference

Interview data also revealed the widespread recognition of service boundedness as a fundamental value within the SLPAO. It was commonly observed that the organization needs its officers to be duty conscious while being responsible and accountable in their performances. Top-level executives value diligence, commitment, and hard work as fundamental requirements in public services, as is evident in organizational documents. For example, the Establishment Code (E-Code) dedicates a section to negligence as an offense in Sri Lankan public service, covering errors, mistakes, and failure to supervise programs or staff to prevent wastage or damage to public funds and property. KI 2 also brought a traditional Sinhalese quote "*Rajakariya; the duty to the King is always superior to the Dawakariya; the duty to the God*" into discussion, to stress the importance of the organization's expectation of being duty conscious. According to the members of the top management, the compulsory requirement to declare the loyalty of the officers towards the state is a reflection of the organization's basic expectation of service boundedness. Another common point emphasized in this regard was the importance of careful and economical use of funds and resources. Top-level managers stressed the need to adhere to comprehensive Financial Regulations, reminding public officers of their duty to serve properly as their salaries come from public funds. However, the values underlying current practices often differ from those used by organizations. Many key informants acknowledged complaints about organizational performance, citing passivity, indifference, and lack of duty consciousness. Behaviors such as omitting duties, lethargy, seeking excuses, negligence, and carelessness were noted as significant reflections of this condition. According to KI 2:

"Some employees are not eager or willing to provide services. They are not enthusiastic in performing the tasks and duties of their job."

In addition, blind adherence to rules, silencing of discipline violations, delays, leniency and biases of law enforcement, and development of complex structures were also identified by top-level executives as indications of passivity and indifference, which in turn resulted in inefficiencies through delays in responses and reactions, unproductive work, lack of concern regarding results, absence of targets, lengthy and complex processes, and less follow-up. As viewed by KI 3, "Officers are not keen enough to search ways of getting the things done within the existing regulatory

framework. Instead, they used to find ways to avoid doing the tasks or to reject the requests”, where KI 12 went on saying:

“To be frank, many of the times, the system [of the organization] is not responding quickly to the service requests of the public. It has been accustomed to pass the ball ... from place to place... without urgently addressing the need. This is a commonly criticized phenomenon in the front-line offices.”

Looking at the poor service boundedness from a different angle, Key Informant 10 asserted: *“Most of the time, programmes are implemented without a strong idea of their results. For instance, in programmes for improving productivity, our people pay attention on physical appearances. But actually, being a service organization, we must give priority to improving service productivity.”*

Similarly, top-level managers asserted that poor effectiveness was reflected in irrational decisions and actions, lack of creativity and innovativeness, absence of long-term strategic policies, less attention to sustainability, high rigidity, system distractions, and negative attitudes, as well as lack of concern about expertise indicated by inadequate skills and competencies, awareness, and experience, which leads to the organization’s performance towards passivity and indifference. The prevailing condition is clearly depicted in the words of KI 12, who said that:

“Many officers tend to blindly implement the decisions or orders given by their superiors. They do not want to see or predict the outcomes in a rational and logical mind” a view confirmed by many other key informants.

Thus, the insights of top managers clearly indicate service boundedness as a key value espoused by the organization while observing that it has deviated towards passivity and indifference in various aspects of actual operations.

4.4 Good Governance Vs. Submission and Dependency

Organizational documents contain various provisions to communicate an organization’s expectations of maintaining a governance system attributed to formality and order, efficiency, effectiveness, independence, and expertise.

Top management also emphasized adherence to formalities, structures, predefined procedures, rules, consistency, discipline, and consideration of seniority and service categories as key concerns in an organization's functioning. Key Informant 8 stressed the importance of operating within the well-organized structure and associated guidelines, where KI 11 highlighted the possibility of making tasks easier and more effective by following formalities. Additionally, top managers emphasized the need to follow clear formalities in the public sector to ensure orderly operations and

accountability, given its reliance on public funds. Efficiency and effectiveness were also expressed as key concerns by top managers regarding organizational performance. They assert that the organization always expects to attain rationality and logic, strategic thinking, and tactfulness, with a clear and strong vision oriented towards sustainability.

KI 1 mentioned:

“Public service should focus on the long-term development of the country, selecting most appropriate goals and programmes which are capable enough to support the economic and social development.”

Explaining the willingness of the organization to bring rationality beyond mere adherence to the regulatory framework, KI 2 asserted the following:

“There is an adequate space within the regulatory framework to make rational decisions. Rational decisions made in critical situations beyond the routine patterns are not questioned. Rationality in decision making and implementation is essential.”

Top-level executives emphasized the importance of independence in ensuring good governance within public services. They stressed the significance of unbiasedness, straightforwardness, independence, autonomy, and political neutrality. KI 3 highlighted the organization's expectations for members to make independent decisions and act correctly. Furthermore, there was unanimous agreement among top-level executives regarding the importance of political neutrality, with emphasis on refraining from active political involvement. Sharing his views on the common need to be politically neutral, KI 2 stated the following:

“Public officers should not involve in political activities in public. They should not take part in political campaigns or meetings in official capacity. They should be politically neutral and un-biased in performing their duties. There should be a strong capability of abstaining from unfair/illegal political interferences.”

Expertise in performing organizational work was also viewed as an essential means to serve good governance. Top managers stressed the competencies, skillfulness, vast exposure, knowledge, and awareness of employees as crucial constituents of their expertise. It was agreed that qualifications alone were insufficient without practical skills including humanistic, technical, and conceptual abilities. Most importantly KI 1 mentioned, *“Ability to understand, adopt to, and uphold appropriate values should also be considered as a skill.”* However, KI 2 noted a decline in training and exposure for decision-making level public servants in recent times, resulting in less informed

decision-making processes. He stressed the necessity of extensive training and exposure, particularly in decision-making roles.

Overall, the perspective of top-level executives indicates a discrepancy in the implementation of good governance principles, where instead of demonstrating independence, employees exhibit dependency on superiors or procedures in decision-making and implementation. They display reluctance to exercise autonomy and respond promptly, often resulting in political influence, as observed by top managers. KI 8's response clearly shows the deviation of the prevailing conditions from expectations:

"Our people like to follow rather than acting independently. They prefer to wait for someone else's decision or order to act on. Even when they have given authority to make decisions, they pass the task to some other authoritative party."

KI 2 attributed this dependency and submission to commonly observed high risk aversion of the members. Explaining the extent to which the dependency and submission has become a valued concern, KI 12 lamented saying *"sometimes even the top and upper-level managers also depend on political authorities for benefits and privileges."* This shows how actual practices have deviated far from good governance while leaning towards submission and dependency.

4.5 Humanity and Morality Vs. Distrust

According to the views of the top managers, humanity and morality are highly concerned about the value of the organization, where they think of qualities such as friendliness, consideration, politeness, hospitality, humanism, mutual respect, moral obligations, morality and ethics, collectiveness, and cooperation need to be embedded in its functioning. Furthermore, lawfulness, righteousness, and good personal conduct are also mentioned as important aspects of morality. KI 7 explained the organization's expectations while stressing the responsibility of the managers/executive-level officers to lead the organization towards righteousness:

"Officers should respect the laws and perform their duties legally. They should not allow unlawful requests; surrender unlawful influences or involve in unlawful practices. The Heads of the organizations/departments/sections/units should be righteous persons. Only they can attempt to encourage the subordinates to be righteous. Righteousness is a fundamental quality that is valued here."

Having explained the terms honesty, genuineness, trustworthiness, and integrity, they were highlighted as important values espoused by the organization in the responses

of top-level managers. KI 10 mentioned:

“Integrity should be an essential trait of a public officer. Public property should not be used for personal interests. As guided by the E-code provisions and other regulations they should avoid accepting any kind of gift from customers or public for rendering his official duties.”

Further, fairness and justice, impartiality, participation, and democracy were also expressed by top managers as essential concerns of the organization. The right to be free from any form of discrimination is assured by the Constitution, where discriminating a person based on any grounds in an administrative action has been declared a violation of fundamental rights (Chapter III, Constitution). As viewed by KI 1:

“Fairness and justice should be there always. Both in internal operations as well as in providing services to the citizens we should make fair and just decisions and we should act fairly and justly.”

However, rather than upholding integrity, fairness, justice, and loyalty, as expected, prevailing concerns within the system indicated a lack of trust as a prevalent value in action. Organizational performance is characterized by dishonesty, lack of trustworthiness and dependability, non-disclosure of relevant information, and fostering an atmosphere of distrust. Additionally, unjust and unfair decisions, favoritism and biases, hierarchical decision-making, and instances of discrimination based on service or gender contribute to the erosion of trust among employees. Weak psychological connections and a lack of genuine commitment to uphold the organization's core values were also identified by top management as factors intensifying distrust in day-to-day operations.

Overall, the study indicated a distinctive list of values attached to SLPAO, with the existence of a significant conflict between the values professed by the organization and those practiced in its operations and overall performance at the collective level. This finding is in line with the existing literature that refers to public values as normative consensus regarding citizens' entitlements, obligations to society and the state, and principles underpinning governance and policies (Bozeman, 2007). Public values have been analyzed from a variety of perspectives, identifying several value inventories from different public administrative contexts (Raadschelders & Rutgers, 1999). For instance, Schreurs (2005) and Bekke et al. (1996) trace 63 different values where Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) identify 72 registered values. This study identified four broader prime values (public interest, service boundedness, good governance, and humanity and morality) with 15 constituent values (Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007). Furthermore, Jorgensen and Bozeman (2007) identified seven

constellations of public values related to the coverage of the public sector's societal contribution, the link between societal interests and decisions, interactions between public administration and politicians, the environment, internal functions, employee behavior, and citizen engagement. The value categories identified in this study are mainly associated with the public sector's contribution to society (public interest and service boundedness), internal functions (good governance), and employee behavior (humanity and morality). The values thematized in this study align with the public value frameworks proposed by Nabatchi (2018). Accordingly, SLPAO has value in the political (independence, public interest), legal (e.g., lawfulness and righteousness; fairness and justice), organizational (e.g., formality and order, service boundedness), and market spheres (e.g., thriftiness and efficiency). Furthermore, the espoused values of the SLPAO can be identified in ethical (e.g., humanity and morality), democratic (good governance), professional (service boundedness), and people (public interest) value categories, as proposed by Kernaghan (2003). Similarly, the espoused values of SLPAO can be aligned with other public value classifications, such as hard and soft values (Waldo, 1992), and traditional and emerging values (Rutgers, 2009). Moreover, the findings of this study reflect the conflicting nature of the values commonly observed in the context of public administration (Bozeman, 2007; Campbell, 1997; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007; O'Flynn, 2007).

The multiplicity of organizational values indicated in the findings can be explained on the basis of the Theory of Action (Argyris & Schon, 1974) which distinguishes espoused theories and theories-in-action as different mental models guiding the behavior. Accordingly, values are considered a unit of description for the knowledge that informs action (Argyris & Schon, 1974), thus, the mismatch of espoused-enacted values highlighted in the findings also indicates unaddressed issues and opportunities underutilized relating to organizational learning. As explained by Senge (1990), in the concept of learning organization, poorly enforced disciplines of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning weaken organizational learning, resulting in gaps between expectations and reality. Hence, espoused-enacted value incongruence can also be attributed to unresolved issues and underutilized opportunities in the organizational learning domain.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study clearly reveal that there is a gap between espoused and enacted values in Sri Lankan PAO. While the PAO expects to uphold public interest, service boundedness, good governance, and humanity and morality as its espoused values, it appears that the values enacted in actual performance deviated from those

that manifested personal interests, submission and dependence, distrust, passivity, and indifference. The mapping of the espoused and enacted values of the SLPAO presented in this study indicates the possibility of formulating well-defined and more focused strategies to embed espoused values while eliminating unnecessary enacted values. The widely accepted view that public administrative reforms should be associated with necessary changes in the organizational culture and ideologies of management and employees (Diefenbach, 2009) is a reasonable basis for explaining the implications of the findings of the study. Accordingly, precise identification of the espoused and enacted values and the gaps between them is of immense importance in creating such an effective alignment between public administrative reforms and the context by carefully looking at the problems and developing different specific strategies to address the relevant issues prevailing at each level. Further, the theoretical implications of the findings extend the concept of value incongruence to the public value domain from a normative perspective while supporting the Theory of Action (Argyris & Schon, 1974) as a possible explanation of value conflicts in public administration. In light of Senge's (1990) concept of organizational learning, the absence of appropriate personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking contributes to the mismatch between expectations and reality in organizational values reflected in espoused-enacted value incongruence. Thus, cognition and learning appear to be grounds for addressing public value conflicts from a normative perspective.

6. Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into SLPAO's organizational values, it has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. This study provides context-specific findings and thus has limited generalizability. Additionally, the sample size of 14 executives from the highest tiers of management might not adequately represent the entire organization, potentially overlooking perspectives from lower-level employees or other stakeholders. Furthermore, depending solely on the perspectives of key informants for data collection, the researcher's involvement in the analysis process may introduce potential subjectivity and interpretation biases. Thus, this study unveils future research opportunities beyond these specified limitations. Further, the findings highlight the need for a thorough investigation into the antecedents and consequences of value gaps and indicate the possibility of evaluating organizational values in the public sector from an organizational learning perspective in future research.

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The Impact of Big Five Personality on Executive Employees' Job Performance: Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in a Selected Public Financial Institution in Sri Lanka

W. M. Sanjeevani K. Weerasekara

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
wmsanjeewani@yahoo.com

G. Dinoka N. Perera

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
dinokagnp@sjp.ac.lk

Abstract

The impact of an individual's Big Five Personality (BFP) on Job Performance (JP) is an important concept that has received widespread attention in the contemporary world. This study investigates the impact of an executive employee's big five personality on job performance, with Job Satisfaction (JS) as the mediating factor for executive employees in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. This study employs trait theory and a Five-Factor Model, analyzing individuals through a self-administered questionnaire utilizing a natural setting. The questionnaire comprises 75 statements and a demographic profile as the measurement instrument. Thirty executives were the subjects of the pilot test. 150 executives from the chosen public-sector financial institution made up the sample size. The data was analyzed using regression analysis and the correlation coefficient technique, with statistical data analysis conducted using SPSS 26. The study revealed that the big five personality and job satisfaction significantly influence executive employees' job performance and confirmed the mediation effect of job satisfaction. This study supports the big five personality and job satisfaction effects on job performance, offering insights for future human resources management planning such as recruitment, deployment, capacity development, and performance reviews in both the public and private sectors. Longitudinal and subsequent studies using alternative data collection techniques like interviews, samples, and mixed methods are recommended for more in-depth and diverse findings.

Keywords: Big Five Personality, Executive Employees, Job Performance, Job Satisfaction, Public Sector, Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

Human capital, integral to organizational success, involves employees who innovate and strategize to meet goals despite advancements in knowledge (Ullaha et al., 2022). Scholars, like Harris and Brown (2021) and Mubarik et al. (2020), stressed the importance of employees' competencies, including knowledge and skills, in achieving organizational success. This focus on human capital underscores its critical and strategic role in organizations.

Quality Human Resources (HR) are essential for organizational continuity; lacking them can disrupt operations (Chandler, 2018). Personality, a combination of physical and mental traits, is crucial for an organization's success. Goldberg (1992) contributed to the development of The Big Five Personality Model, highlighting five dimensions: Extroversion (E), Emotional Stability (ES), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (OE). These dimensions' influence job performance and job satisfaction (Feist, 2010; Motowidlo et al., 2018). In today's unstable economic environment, organizations need active and dedicated employees to perform high levels of job performance. Chandrasekara's study in 2019 links the big five personalities, job performance, and job satisfaction, underlining their interconnectedness in achieving organizational goals.

A satisfied employee puts more effort into job performance and uses more effort, resulting in long-term success. Understanding the relationship between the big five personality and job performance in the public sector is essential for effective recruitment, deployment, and significant Human Resources (HR) management decisions. Understanding the relationship between personality characteristics and job performance in the public sector is necessary. According to Armstrong (2009), those entail being aware of the importance of individual differences, the attributes that explain how people behave, their personalities, and the types of behavior prevalent in organizational settings. A satisfied employee puts more effort into job performance and then exerts more effort. As a result, every organization develops a contented staff to ensure the organization's long-term success. In 2014, Amir, Naz, Hafeez, Ashfaq, and Dogar revealed that a positive relationship exists between big five personality, job performance and economic success over the life path.

This study delves into the impact of big five personality on job performance among executive employees, considering the mediating role of job satisfaction, within a

specific public financial institution in Sri Lanka. It aims to bridge three key research gaps.

Population gap is investigating big five personality, job performance, and job satisfaction, within the Sri Lankan context, focusing on the unique population of executive employees in public financial institutions.

Knowledge gap is addressing the lack of research on the mediating effect of job satisfaction, on the relationship between big five personality and job performance, particularly in the HR Management field and the specific context of Sri Lanka's public sector.

Empirical gap is contributing empirical evidence by studying the impact of big five personality on executive job performance in public financial institutions, which is an underexplored area in global research, especially in sectors like universities and hospitals. Under this context, this study aims to answer the following research question:

Do the big five personalities impact on executive employees' job performance with the mediating role of job satisfaction in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka?

Although various research has been carried out (Chandrasekara, 2019; Higgs & Lichtenstein, 2010; Jabbar et al., 2021; Putro, 2022; Kang & Malvaso, 2023), there is still a need to fill the existing gaps. This study aims to address this empirical gap in the literature and explore the impact of big five personality and job satisfaction, on job performance among public sector executives in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it is expected to examine (1) The impact of big five personality on executive employees' job performance, (2) The impact of big five personality on executive employees' job satisfaction, (3) The impact of job satisfaction, on executive employees' job performance and (4) determine whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between the big five personality and executive employees' job performance in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Personality

Personality is a comprehensive concept designed by an individual's ambitions, feelings, and fundamental psychological processes. Several theories attempt to capture its complexity, including the Five-Factor Model, Trait Theory, Three

Dimensions of Personality, and the Sixteen-Factor Model. The Five-Factor Model explains personality into five key traits: agreeableness, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Trait Theory, pioneered by Allport (1937), proposes that traits arrange mental structures that differ among individuals. Raymond Cattell's Sixteen-Factor Model develops an adapted questionnaire to evaluate personality based on sixteen distinct traits (Novikova, 2013).

The "Big Five" theory has emerged as a broad framework, highlighting additional personality traits while incorporating insights from numerous psychological theories. The big five personality explains structural characteristics that classify individuals based on their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Personality is a complicated combination of biological influences and environmental pressures, containing various behavioral, emotional, and cognitive qualities. Trait theory gained prominence in the 1980s, leading to the establishment of the five-factor structure derived from Cattell's work, further validated, and expanded upon by Donald Fiske, Norman, Smith, Goldberg, McCrae, and Costa (Cherry, 2019).

The big five personality models contain five key dimensions that capture a person's personality traits: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability. These dimensions are crucial in shaping an individual's behavior and interactions. Openness to experience is vital for adapting to changing situations and acquiring new skills, making it essential for an organization's future endeavors. Conscientiousness reflects traits such as dependability, efficiency, and deliberate conduct, contributing to an individual's reliability in various tasks. Extroversion is often associated with success in leadership roles, while Agreeableness is important for fostering positive interpersonal relationships through helpfulness, forgiveness, and trustworthiness. Emotional stability measures neurotic tendencies, influencing how individuals handle stress and emotional challenges. Research indicates that these big five personality traits significantly impact individual job performance, especially in tasks conducting independently.

2.2 Job Performance

Job performance is a crucial measure for organizations, evaluating employees' achievements and contributions to organizational success. It involves various dimensions such as task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behavior (Koopmans et al., 2014). Task performance focuses on employees' proficiency in completing primary job duties, directly impacting outcomes and results. Contextual performance measures

individual actions that contribute to the organizational, social, and psychological aspects of the work environment, supporting the overall functioning of the organization. Counterproductive work behavior, which includes tardiness, dishonesty, off-task behavior, absence, and substance use, can negatively affect organizational well-being and productivity. Adaptive performance is a unique aspect of personal job performance, reflecting an employee's ability to adapt to job situations or work demands effectively. Overall, job performance is a critical criterion that reflects employees' resourcefulness and alignment with organizational goals.

2.3 Job Satisfaction

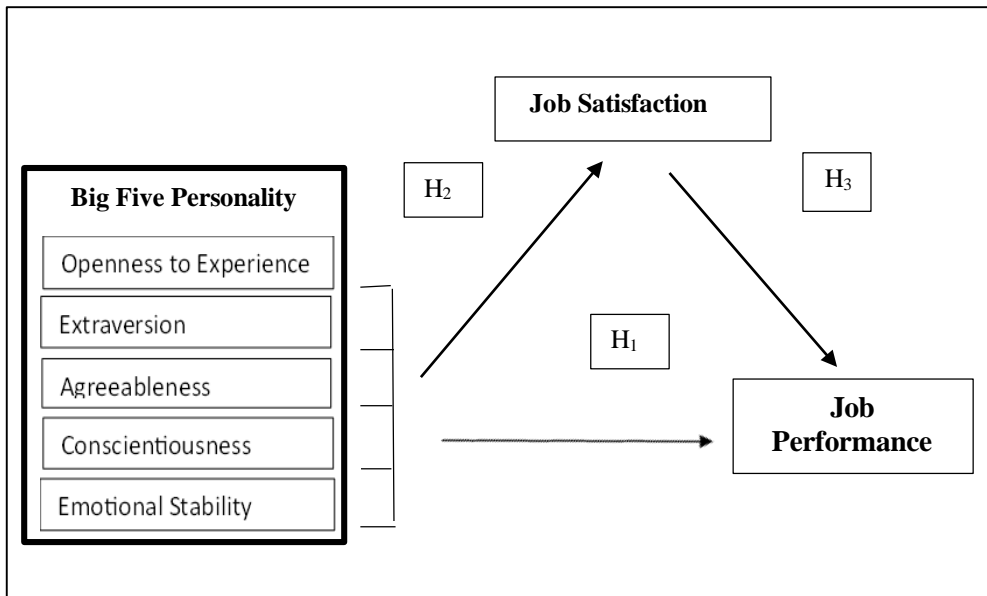
Job satisfaction is a positive attitude in the workplace that fosters employee commitment and adaptability to job demands. It's influenced by how well employees perceive their work environment meeting their individual needs, significantly impacting on their overall satisfaction. Job satisfaction is vital for both employees and organizations and is a focal point in management and organizational behavior studies.

Key factors affecting job satisfaction include pay, work environment, promotions, supervision, workgroup dynamics, and working conditions (Luz & Oliveira, 2018). Pay is crucial as it helps meet higher-level needs and reflects employees' perceived value to towards the organization. Promotions, with their varied forms and associated privileges, have a nuanced impact on job satisfaction. Positive supervisor interactions contribute significantly to job satisfaction, as do the nature of the work itself, including duties, learning opportunities, and responsibilities. Work conditions are influenced by the success and enthusiasm of others, and effective management empowers employees to make decisions, fostering ownership and commitment. Organizations must establish standards, provide support, and promote a positive work culture to enhance job satisfaction and overall productivity.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Reviewing the established literature, the conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 01. In the conceptual framework big five personality was considered as the independent construct, job performance as the dependent construct, and job satisfaction as the mediator construct.

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework



Source: Based on Literature Review

2.5 Big Five Personality and Employees' Job Performance

The study examines the correlation between the big five personality and job performance, particularly in sales roles, revealing moderate correlations between extroversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and job performance. It underscores the implication of considering sub-dimensions of personality in assessing job performance. Higgs and Lichtenstein's (2010) research underscores the importance of personality traits and values in job performance and growth. Additionally, Youshan and Hassan's study in 2015 highlights the impact of big five personality on job performance leading to the formulation of the first hypothesis:

(H₁): Big Five personalities significantly impact on executive employees' job performance

2.5.1 Openness to Experience Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Openness to experience characterized by acceptance of change, creativity, and cognitive flexibility, has a significant impact on job performance among executive employees. Studies by Judge et al. (1999) and Barrick et al. (2001) have noted the

influence of openness to experience on job performance. Therefore, the first sub-hypothesis formulated as,

H1a: Openness to Experience significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance

2.5.2 Extroversion Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Extroversion (E) is a reliable personality predictor of leadership and job performance. Zakaria and Yusof (2018) indicate a relatively positive association between extroversion and job performance. Extroversion may have a non-linear relationship with performance (Blickle et al., 2015). In line with that, the second sub-hypothesis is as follows:

H1b: Extroversion significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance

2.5.3 Agreeableness Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Agreeableness(A) is a key factor in job performance, with research showing a low positive relationship between agreeableness and job performance (Zakaria & Yusof, 2018). People with high agreeableness tend to be more motivated, satisfied, and follow norms, leading to quick integration into new groups and organizations. Rishipal and Nidhi's study in 2013 assessed the effects of improved psychological characteristics, such as self-image and agreeableness on job performance. The hypothesis is that the concepts of agreeableness and self-image depend on job performance. Accordingly, the following is the subsequent sub-hypothesis:

H1c: Agreeableness significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance

2.5.4 Conscientiousness significantly impacts on executive employees' Job Performance

Conscientiousness personality traits, including diligence, thoroughness, accountability, preparation, and persistence, strongly correlate with job performance. Research has shown a positive correlation between conscientiousness and outcomes, with conscientiousness justifying outcomes as having the strongest correlation (Sulaiman et al., 2012). Conscientious personalities possess thorough preparation, efficient management, and time management, leading to further job performance. The hypothesis is as follows;

H1d: Conscientiousness significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance

2.5.5 Emotional Stability Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Digman (1990) identified neuroticism as indicating adaptation as opposed to emotional stability (ES) and addressing the level of the person being anxious and insecure. Emotional stability is replaced by depression, calmness, self-confidence, and coolness (Kariyawasam & Welmilla, 2020). According to another research, neuroticism was negatively related to job performance (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). Based on the preceding evidence, it is hypothesized as follows;

H1e: Emotional Stability significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance

2.6 Big Five Personality and Employees' Job Satisfaction

Balasuriya and Perera (2016) found that personality traits like agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness have a significant positive effect on job satisfaction among executives in private hospitals. Ranasinghe and Kottawatta's (2016) found a significant impact of big five personality traits on job satisfaction among school teachers. Bui (2017) found a strong relationship between UK employees' big five personality traits and job satisfaction. Ijaz and Khan (2015) found that extroversion and openness to experience positively correlated with job satisfaction, while emotional stability was strongly associated with job satisfaction. Tham (2019) found that big five personality has the most significant influence on job satisfaction. The hypothesis is developed as follows:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Big Five personality significantly impacts on executive employees' job satisfaction

2.7 Job Satisfaction and Employees' Job Performance

Vroom (1964) and Helmi and Abunar (2021) highlighted the importance of job satisfaction and job performance in government and local business sectors. Cook (2008) and Inuwa (2016) emphasized the connection between job satisfaction and job performance. Pushpakumari (2008) found a favorable association between employees' job satisfaction and job performance, suggesting organizations should

focus on employee job satisfaction for higher performance. Therefore, the third hypothesis is developed as:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Job satisfaction significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance

2.8 Job Satisfaction Mediates the Relationship Between the Big Five Personality and Employees' Job Performance

Chandrasekara (2019) found that job satisfaction has a mediating effect on the relationship between big five personality and job performance. Hence, the final hypothesis is developed as follows:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between the big five personality and executive employees' job performance

3. Methodology

This study uses an analytical research method to examine the impact of big five personality on job performance of executive employees within a chosen public financial institution in Sri Lanka. The unit of analysis comprises individual officers functioning at the executive level within the institution. To minimize disruption to daily operations, the study was conducted with minimal interference in the work procedures of the participants. The research settings are categorized into contrived settings, which are artificial, and non-contrived settings, representing natural work environments. This study adopts a cross-sectional design, executed once to gather data from 150 executive employees selected through a census sampling technique. Data collection primarily relies on questionnaires distributed among the chosen participants, supplemented by secondary data from e-journals, journals, government records, and books. Data analysis techniques included Preliminary Analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Univariate Analysis, Pearson Correlation Analysis, Multiple Regression Analysis, And Mediator Analysis. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software was used for preliminary analysis to handle missing data, outliers, and assumption testing, EFA validated measurement items, while univariate analysis assessed variables' distributions. Regression analysis identified direct and indirect effects, Pearson correlation analyzed linear relationships, and multiple regression defined functional correlations. Mediator analysis was complemented by the Sobel test.

3.1 Measures

The first part of the questionnaire consists of statements on big five personality, and the study used a scale of 25 items (McCrae & Costa, 2010). The second section of the questionnaire consists of information about job performance, a scale of 40 items has been used (Koopmans, 2014). The third part of the questionnaire consists of data on job satisfaction. For this reason, a scale of 05 items is used concerning the work (Luz & Oliveira, 2018). With the provided question statements, respondents were asked to mark their best judgment or assessment on a scale of 5 Likert points, with 5 being "Strongly Agree" and 1 being "Strongly Disagree". The fourth section describes gathering data regarding the executive employees' demographics, such as gender, age group, marital status, the highest level of education, and years of employment.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis

This section outlines the process and outcomes of assessing the validity and reliability of the 75-item questionnaire used to measure big five personality, job performance, and job satisfaction dimensions among executive employees in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. Content validity was established through a pilot test involving 30 executives, ensuring the questionnaire accurately captured the intended dimensions. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and yielded values between 0.6 and 0.9, indicating good internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014).

The procedures and findings related to data preparation, screening, and statistical testing were conducted on responses from 129 executive employees, achieving an 86% response rate. Data preparation involved addressing missing data, outliers, ensuring multivariate assumptions, sample adequacy, EFA (refer Table 01), and reliability testing (refer Table 02). Assumptions such as normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were tested using Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, visual inspection of data plots, and tolerance values (VIF) to detect multicollinearity, with a cutoff tolerance rate of 0.10. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship ($r=.656$, $p < .001$) between big five personality and job performance, indicating that these variables tend to increase together with a moderate strength of association. EFA was utilized as a data reduction method, identifying common clusters and factors with loadings above 0.5 for further analysis.

Table 01: Summary of EFA

Construct	Removed items	Factor loading >.5 (Min-Max)
BFP	None	0.726 - 0.883
JP	None	0.702 - 0.914
JS	None	0.747 - 0.932

Source: Survey Data (2023)

4.2 Assessing Reliability of Constructs

All Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.70 in Table 02. Hence the reliability of the variables was ensured.

Table 02: Reliability of Constructs

CRONBACH ALPHA		
VARIABLE	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
BFP	25	.762
JP	45	.816
JS	05	.802

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Content validity describes explanatory items' adequacy and representativeness (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to the literature, particular concepts and methods for this study were developed and carried out. Construct validity is the evaluation of measurable objects' underlying conceptual framework through convergent and discriminant validity, as per Kevin and Andrew (2012). Convergent validity refers to the high correlation between two indicators measuring the same concept. In this study, a Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.6 or more is considered acceptable, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is below 0.5 (refer Table 03).

Table 03: Convergent Validity

VARIABLE	NO. OF QUESTIONS	FACTOR MIN- MAX>0.3	CR>0.7	AVE >0.5
BFP	25	1.765 * 0.026	0.931	0.775
JP	45	1.683 * 0.018	0.964	0.862
JS	5	1.538 * 0.072	0.762	0.641

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Table 03 confirms the construct's convergent validity, with CR values above 0.7 and AVE above 0.5, indicating that the latent variable accounts for over half of the fitting indicators' variance.

Discriminant validity is established when measures are not theoretically highly correlated with each other (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A comparison of the squared AVE value of the correlation estimates is used to examine the present study's discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014). Table 04 below presents the results of discriminant validity.

Table 04: Validity

VARIABLE	BFP	JP	JS
BFP	1	.656	.518
JP	.656	1	.731
JS	.518	.731	1

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Table 04 above depicts the data for discriminant validity and the result of the present study. It ensures discriminant validity as the squared coefficient values are below the AVE (Huang et al., 2013).

4.2 Demographic Profile of the Sample

The demographic profile of the sample from the survey data indicates a slightly higher representation of females at 62% compared to males at 38%. The age distribution shows that most respondents fall within the 28-35 age, comprising 61% of the sample, followed by 36-48-year-olds at 27%. In terms of marital status, 75% of respondents are married, while 23% are single. Most respondents reported having two children.

Regarding education, the majority hold master's degrees (62%) or equivalent qualifications like CIMA/Chartered/Other Education. In terms of employment-related experience, the respondents were categorized into four age groups. 14 with under six years of experience, 31 with six to twelve years, and 53 with twelve to eighteen years. Thirty-one respondents have over 18 years of experience. Additionally, 41% of respondents reported having experience from twelve to eighteen years in the public sector.

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

4.3.1 H1: *Big Five personality significantly impacts on executive employees' job performance*

According to Table 05, there is a significant association between the big five personality and the job performance. The results show that the R Square value was .430. That means job performance explains 43 percent of the variance in the big five personality.

Table 05: Model Summary Big Five Personality on Job Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Sq.	Std. Error of Est.
1	.656 ^a	.430	.42	.18538

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The p-value is less than 0.05, according to Table 06 below. It means job performance is used to predict big five personality. Based on those results, the regression equation related to the job performance of executive employees is:

$$\text{Job Performance} = 1.516 + .533 (\text{big five personality})$$

Thus, for every unit increase in big five personality, job performance is expected to increase by .533.

Table 06: Coefficients Statistics of Big Five Personality on Job Performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients			t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Constant	1.516	.199		7.636	.000
	BFP	.533	.055	.656	9.783	.000

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Table 07: ANOVA -H₁

		ANOVA ^a				Sig.
Model		Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	
1	Regression	3.289	1	3.289	95.708	.000 ^b
	Residual	4.364	127	.034		
	Total	7.653	128			

a. Dependent Variable: Job Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Big Five Personality

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The study's p-value is below 0.05, indicating a significant positive impact of big five personality on employee job performance, thus accepting Hypothesis 1 (H₁).

Table 08 revealed the summary statistics of this study's sub-hypotheses H_{1a}, H_{1b}, H_{1c}, H_{1d}, and H_{1e}.

Table 08: Summary Statistics of Sub Hypotheses

	H _{1a}	H _{1b}	H _{1c}	H _{1d}	H _{1e}
Pearson Correlation	.542	.477	.401	.279	.537
R Square	.293	.227	.161	.078	.288
Coefficient Beta	.284	.221	.273	.143	.347
P-value at ANOVA	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000

Source: Survey Data (2023)

4.3.2 H_{1a}: Openness to Experience Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

The study found a positive association between openness to experience and job performance among executive employees in a Sri Lankan public financial institution, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.542**, indicating a moderate positive relationship at the 99 percent confidence level. The regression analysis is conducted to assess the impact of openness to experience on job performance. The R-squared value of the model summary is 0.293, showing that openness to experience accounts for 29% of the variation in job performance. Here also, the p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, this validates that openness to experience has a significant positive effect on employee job performance in this study. According to these statistical findings, it concludes that hypothesis H_{1a} is accepted.

4.3.3 H_{1b}: Extraversion Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Table 08 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables is 0.477. A relationship was found between extroversion and job performance among the executives in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. Since the significant value indicates 0.000, it observes that the relationship is statistically moderate as a positive association at the 99 percent confidence level of the model. This study statistically assures that extroversion and job performance have a positive relationship. Regression analysis is performed to evaluate the impact of extroversion on job performance. Based on the model summary, the R-squared value is 0.227, showing that the variance in extroversion accounts for 23% of job performance. The p-value is less than 0.05. Accordingly, extroversion significantly positively affects the employee job performance in this study. It concludes that hypothesis H_{1b} is accepted based on these statistical findings.

4.3.4 H_{1c}: Agreeableness Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Table 08 shows that the two variables' Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.401. A relationship was found between agreeableness and job performance among executive employees in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. Since the significant value indicates 0.000, it observes that the relationship is moderately significant as a positive association at the 99 percent confidence level of the model. It statistically confirms that agreeableness, and job performance have a positive relationship based

on this study area. Regression analysis is performed to evaluate the impact of agreeableness on job performance. According to the model summary, the R-squared value is 0.161, showing that the variance in agreeableness accounts for 16% of job performance. Table 8 shows that the P-value was less than 0.05. Accordingly, agreeableness significantly positively affects the employee job performance in this study. It concludes that hypothesis H_{1c} is accepted based on these statistical findings.

4.3.5 H1d: Conscientiousness Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Table 08 presents the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.279 between variables conscientiousness and job performance, indicating a weak positive relationship among executive employees in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. The significant value of 0.000 at a 99% confidence level confirms the statistical significance of this positive association. Regression analysis further evaluates the impact of conscientiousness on job performance, with the R-squared value of 0.078 indicating that approximately 8% of the variance in job performance can be explained by conscientiousness. The P-value, less than 0.05, signifies the significant positive impact of conscientiousness on employee job performance in this study. Therefore, hypothesis H1d, which suggests a positive relationship between conscientiousness and job performance, is supported by these statistical findings.

4.3.6 H1e: Emotional Stability Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

The study aimed to assess the relationship between emotional stability and job performance among executive employees in a specific public financial institution in Sri Lanka. The analysis revealed a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.537, indicating a strong positive relationship between emotional stability and job performance. The significant value of 0.000 at a 99% confidence level confirms the statistical significance of this positive association. Regression analysis further quantified the impact of emotional stability on job performance, with an R-squared value of 0.347, signifying that 35% of the variance in job performance can be attributed to emotional stability. The P-value, less than 0.05, confirms the significant positive impact of emotional stability on employee job performance in this study. Consequently, hypothesis H_{1e}, which posits a positive relationship between emotional stability and job performance, is supported by these statistical findings.

Table 09: Model Summary Big Five Personality on Job Satisfaction

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.518 ^a	.268	.263	.41224

Source: Survey Data (2023)

In Table 09, the correlation value between the variables appears as .518. According to its depicted data, it demonstrates that big five personality and job satisfaction have a significant positive association. Table 09 results show that the multiple regression coefficients (R) of the big five personality and the related DV (job satisfaction) were .518, and the R Square value was .268. That means 27 percent of the variance (R Square) in the big five personality explained by job satisfaction.

Table 10: Coefficients of Big Five Personality on Job Satisfaction

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Constant	1.029	.441		2.331	.000
	BFP	.828	.121	.518	6.827	.000

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The p-value is less than 0.05, according to Table 10 above. It means job satisfaction can be used to predict big five personality. Based on those results, the regression equation related to the job satisfaction of executive employees is:

$$\text{Job Satisfaction} = 1.029 + .828 (\text{big five personality})$$

Thus, for every unit increase in the big five personality, job satisfaction is expected to increase by .828.

Table 11: ANOVA - H2

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	7.920	1	.920	46.605	.000 ^b
Residual	21.583	127	.170		
Total	29.503	128			

a. Dependent Variable: FullJS

b. Predictors: (Constant), FullBFP

Source: Survey Data (2023)

According to Table 11, the p-value is below 0.05. It ensures that big five personality has a significant positive impact on executive employees' job satisfaction in this study. Based on those statistical findings, Hypothesis Two (H₂) is accepted.

4.3.7 H₃: Job Satisfaction Significantly Impacts on Executive Employees' Job Performance

Table 12: Model Summary of Job Satisfaction on Job Performance

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. An error in the Estimate</i>
1	.731 ^a	.534	.531	.16751

Source: Survey Data (2023)

In Table 12 the correlation value between the variables appears as .731. Its depicted data detects a strong correlation between the IV (job satisfaction) and the DV (job performance).

Table 12 results show that the multiple regression coefficients (R) of the job satisfaction and the related DV (job performance) were .731, and the R Square value was .534. That means 53 percent of the variance (R Square) in the job satisfaction is explained by job performance.

Table 13: Coefficients of Job Satisfaction on Job Performance

<i>Model</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
1 (Constant)	1.950	.125		15.571	.000
JS	.372	.031	.731	12.073	.000

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The p-value is less than 0.05, according to Table 13 above. It indicates that job performance can predict job satisfaction. Based on those results, the regression equation related to the job performance of executive employees is:

$$\text{Job Performance} = 1.950 + 0.372 (\text{job satisfaction})$$

Thus, for every unit increase in job satisfaction, job performance is expected to increase by .372.

Table 14: ANOVA - H3

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.090	1	4.090	145.749	.000 ^b
	Residual	3.564	127	.028		
	Total	7.653	128			

Source: Survey Data (2023)

According to Table 14, the p-value is below 0.05. It ensures job satisfaction has a significant positive impact on employee job performance in this study. Based on those statistical findings, Hypothesis three (H₃) is accepted.

4.3.8 H₄: Job Satisfaction Mediates the Relationship Between Big Five Personality and Executive Employees' Job Performance

The study utilized multiple regression analysis and the Baron and Kenny (1986) test to examine the mediating effect of job satisfaction between big five personality and job performance. Results indicated that when big five personality and job satisfaction regress against job performance, one unit of change is added to the DV.

Table 15: Results of H4

Testing Steps in the Mediator Model	B	Beta	Std. Error	Sig. Value
Testing Step 1 (Path C)	.533	.656	.055	.000
Outcome – JP				
Predictor – BFP				
Testing Step 2 (Path A)	.372	.731	.031	.000
Mediator – JS				
Predictor - BFP				
Testing Step 3 and 4 (Path B and C')	.272	.535	.032	.000
Outcome – JP				
Mediator – JS				
Predictor – BFP	.308	.378	.051	.000

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Table 15 confirms the statistical significance between DV and IVs, with IV and mediating variables having significant effects. Sobel test is used to identify the mediator's significance, evaluate the coefficient's product, and compare production coefficients with the direct route.

Path A = .372 (0.31)

Path B = .272 (.032)

Table 16: Sobel Test of Mediation

<i>Item</i>	<i>Value</i>
<i>Test Statistic</i>	6.52299226
<i>Std. Error</i>	0.0155498
<i>p-value</i>	0.000

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The study confirms the significant relationship between DV and IVs, with job satisfaction fully mediating the relationship between big five personality and job performance. The Sobel test indicates a significant indirect effect, with maximum mediation evidence when the IV and DV association is zero.

5. Discussion

The study confirms that big five personality can predict employees' job performance, aligning with previous research indicating that big five personality is a key driver of executive employees' job performance. According to regression analysis results, openness to experience can predict job performance. The results of this study are consistent with prior research that revealed that openness to experience is a crucial driver of executive employees' job performance (Griffin & Hesketh, 2004; Sev, 2019; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 1999). According to the results of the regression analysis, openness to experience can predict job performance.

The study's findings align with other research, which showed that extroversion is a significant factor in determining executive employees' job performance (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007; Rusting & Larsen, 1998; Zakaria & Yusof, 2018; Blickle et al., 2015). As regression analysis results show, agreeableness can predict job performance. The findings of this study are consistent with other research that has shown that agreeableness is a significant factor in determining the job performance

of executive employees (McCrae & John, 1992; Judge et al., 1999; Zakaria & Yusof, 2018; Hussein, 2017; McGowan, 2022; Rishipal & Nidhi, 2013). Based on the regression analysis's findings, demonstrate that conscientiousness can forecast job performance.

The findings of the study are consistent with those of other studies that have demonstrated the importance of conscientiousness in predicting executive employees' job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; McCrae & John, 1992; Judge et al., 1999; Sulaiman et al., 2012; Lounsbury et al., 2012). According to the regression analysis, findings show that emotional stability can predict job performance. This study's findings are in line with those of other studies that have shown the importance of emotional stability in predicting executive employees' job performance (Digman, 1990; Kariyawasam & Welmilla, 2020; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). According to Regression analysis, results demonstrate that big five personality can predict job satisfaction. This study's findings are in line with past research that has demonstrated the value of big five personality in predicting executive employees' (Balasuriya & Perera, 2016; Bui, 2017; Ijaz & Khan, 2015; Tham, 2019; Mount et al., 2006; Ranasinghe & Kottawatta, 2016) have found that big five personality has a constructive impact on job performance.

The findings of the regression study demonstrate the ability of job satisfaction to predict job performance. The results of this study are in line with earlier studies that have shown the importance of job satisfaction in predicting executive employees' job performance. This relationship has been tested and proved several times by various studies conducted by (Vroom, 1964; Pushpakumari, 2008; Helmi & Abunar, 2021; Cook, 2008; Inuwa, 2016).

The regression study's results reveal that job satisfaction can mediate between big five personality and job performance. The findings of this study are in line with other research that highlighted the significance of job satisfaction in resolving executive employees' big five personality and job performance. Putro (2022), Chandrasekara (2019) and Mount et al. (2006) have tested and concluded the mediating effect of job satisfaction on big five personality and job performance and the relationship has been empirically proved.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explores the impact of big five personality on the job performance of executive employees in a public financial institution in Sri Lanka. The results support

the first hypothesis, H₁, states that big five personality positively affects job performance, with significant effects on employees' openness to experience, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. The second hypothesis, H₂, supports the second hypothesis, confirming previous studies. The third hypothesis, H₃, shows that job satisfaction positively affects job performance, and the fourth hypothesis, H₄, suggests that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between big five personality and job performance, confirming previous research. The findings are valuable for authorities in public financial institutions to understand how the big five personality impact their job performance.

This study bridges theoretical and practical gaps in HR management, enhancing recruitment, deployment, training, and performance evaluation processes. It strengthens human capital, enhances employee satisfaction, and fills decision-making gaps, impacting public service and Sri Lanka's social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental context.

The aim of the study is to improve HR management decisions and employee performance evaluations, aiding policymakers, and administrators in understanding the impact of big five personality on job performance. Improve HR management decisions and employee performance evaluations, aiding policymakers, and administrators in understanding the impact of big five personality on job performance. It also suggests strategies for executive employees to enhance employee job performance and enhance overall organizational performance. The findings can be applied to identify effective and valuable employees.

This study explores the mediating effect of big five personality and job performance on job satisfaction in HR management, contributing to unexplored literature and laying the groundwork for innovative insights. It validates the influence of these factors using Trait Theory and the Five Factor Model. This study involved 129 executives from a selected public sector financial institution in Sri Lanka. Future research should target other organizations and staff levels. The findings may be limited by the data set and the use of alternative methods like interviews and diverse samples. Expanding future studies with these methods could provide more comprehensive information.

The study emphasizes the importance of personality in recruitment and executive tasks, highlighting the role of the big five personality in hiring new employees. It suggests that organizations can use personality measures during job interviews to improve the big five personality and evaluate employee job performance more

effectively than traditional systems. The findings demonstrate the critical role of big five personality (Openness to experience, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability) and job satisfaction in influencing executive employees' job performance in a selected public financial institution in Sri Lanka. This research confirmed that not only does the big five personality that executive employees possess require a certain degree of job satisfaction to them, which can lead to boosting job performance. These findings are helpful for the selected institution and crucial for every organization. These findings provide a clear picture of the management of private and public institutions relating to big five personality and job performance issues. Accordingly, HR heads should know the personality type they expect executive employees to possess. Other than that, the management should also consider a certain degree of job satisfaction given to the executives because it leads to a high level of job performance among the executive employees.

Besides that, the management of public and private institutions must ensure that they have selected the suitable person best suited to the respective job. Selecting the inappropriate person might influence overall organizational performance and the executive employees' job performance, leading the country's development.

7. Limitations and Future Research

7.1 Limitations

This study's focus on a single public financial institution in Sri Lanka restricts the generalizability of its findings to other institutions and sectors. Variations in organizational culture, management styles, employee category and their demographics across different institutions could affect the applicability of the results. Additionally, the study's use of a small and selectively chosen sample may not fully represent the diversity of executive employees within the institution, potentially introducing bias and reducing the external validity of the findings. Furthermore, data collection through questionnaires may lead to respondent bias, where participants provide socially desirable responses or inaccurately represent their true feelings and experiences. Employing a quantitative approach limits the depth of understanding compared to a mixed methods approach, which could incorporate qualitative data through interviews to provide richer insights into executive employees' big five personality, job performance, and job satisfaction.

7.2 Future Research Directions

To address these limitations and further advance knowledge in the field, future research could explore various avenues. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in executive employees' job performance and job satisfaction over time could offer valuable insights into the long term effects of big five personality within the selected institution and across different sectors. Diversifying samples to include participants from various sectors and locations within Sri Lanka would enhance the generalizability of the findings and allow for comparisons across different contexts. Employing a mixed methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between variables by capturing both quantitative data on big five personality, job performance, job satisfaction and qualitative insights into individual experiences and perceptions.

Moreover, future research could explore additional mediating factors beyond job satisfaction that may influence the relationship between the big five personality and job performance. Factors such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and work environment could be examined to identify their role in shaping employee outcomes. Comparative studies between public and private financial institutions in Sri Lanka could reveal differences in the impact of big five personality on job performance and job satisfaction, informing tailored strategies for enhancing employee outcomes in different organizational settings. Intervention studies testing the effectiveness of strategies aimed at improving job satisfaction and job performance among executive employees could provide practical insights for organizational management by experimenting with various interventions, such as training programs, leadership development initiatives, and organizational restructuring. By addressing these limitations and pursuing these future research directions, scholars can contribute to advancing knowledge in the field of organizational behavior and HR Management within the context of public financial institutions in Sri Lanka.

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Preparedness Level of Achieving Educational Related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4): Evidence from Sri Lanka

R. L. S. Fernando

*University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.
rlsf@sjp.ac.lk*

E. A. I. Kularathna

*University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
chapa.eaik@gmail.com*

Abstract

The government of Sri Lanka has made several efforts toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The country has been implementing free education since the 1940s enabling access to education for all from Grade 1 to University education. The free education system in Sri Lanka has contributed to the country's high Human Development Index (HDI), positioning Sri Lanka at 72 out of 189 countries in 2020 with a 92.4 % adult literacy rate in 2020 (UNDP, 2023). However, it is problematic that the government could achieve SDG 04 by 2030. However, the preparedness for achieving education-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka has not been empirically examined. The main objective of this study is to explore the preparedness level for achieving SDG-04, identify challenges and difficulties in achieving SDG 4 by 2030, and propose policy measures to improve the preparedness level to achieve SDG-04 in Sri Lanka by 2030. Using qualitative research methods, this study selected purposively fifteen (15) responsible organizations. In-depth interviews were conducted with one responsible officer representing each organization. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Preparedness was identified regarding awareness, resource availability, training regarding SDG goals, and collaboration with other related organizations. The study revealed that relevant officers are aware of the 2030 Agenda and the selected organizations have included the SDGs in their action plan. Especially, the officers' awareness of SDG 04 and its indicators, resources availability, training regarding SDG goals, and collaboration with the other related organizations are not at a satisfactory level. Lack of training opportunities on SDGs, prioritization of objectives, lack of monitoring, evaluation of the implementation of SDG 04, lack of authority, lack of staff, and lack of information sharing on SDGs were identified as the main problems and difficulties faced by these organizations in implementing

SDGs programs that may hinder in achieving SDG 04 by 2030. If the current programs are being implemented efficiently, there may be a possibility of achieving the SDG 04 by 2030. Finally, this study proposes policy measures to enhance the preparedness level and address the issues in achieving SDG 04 in Sri Lanka. As there is a dearth of research examining the preparedness level in achieving SDG 04, particularly in Sri Lanka, thus, this study tries to fill this research gap.

Keywords: Preparedness Level, SDG 04, Sri Lanka, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

1. Introduction

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development with 17 development goals was declared by 195 leaders in 2015 as a universal call for fighting poverty, protecting the planet, and improving the lives of everybody everywhere (UNDESA, 2016). In addition to that UNDESA (2016) stated that all UN Member States have made various efforts to adopt and integrate the agenda into their national-level plans to achieve the Goals within 15 years. Sri Lanka too has made several efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals including SDG4 which focuses on education aiming to “Ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

SDG 4 is related to education which is to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ by 2030. Since education is the foundation of any country's social, cultural, spiritual, and economic development, many countries prioritize it in their national development policies. The Sri Lankan government recognizes the right to an education as a fundamental human right, and since 1947, government schools have provided free education to all students from Grade 1 of the government schools to the first-degree level at state universities. As a result, compared to other nations with comparable GDP status, Sri Lanka has a high literacy rate, greater primary and secondary enrolment rates, and higher survival/retention rates (Annual Performance Report - Ministry of Education, 2020).

Although Sri Lanka has carried out many footsteps to achieve SDG, it is very important to find out whether Sri Lanka is ready to achieve those goals, especially in education, goal four of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4) outlines ensuring access to quality education as a global goal. This study examines the level of preparedness in achieving sustainable development Goal 4 in Sri Lanka.

1.1 Background of the Study and Problem Identification

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) seeks to promote sustainable living for future generations, (UNESCO, 2021). But today, more than 262 million children and youth are out of school and six out of ten are not acquiring basic literacy and numeracy after several years in school and 750 million adults are illiterate, fueling poverty and marginalization (UNESCO- Education, 2030, 2021).

Many developing countries still lack basic infrastructure and facilities to provide effective learning environments; as an example, Sub-Saharan Africa faces the biggest challenges, where less than half of the schools have access to electricity, internet, computers, and basic drinking water and rural and urban differentials. About 85 percent of the countries reported higher out-of-school rates for primary and secondary schools in rural areas compared to urban areas (High-level Political Forum on SD, 2019). Resource constraints challenge meeting SDG 4, as only one-third of countries spend between 15 and 20 percent of total government spending on education, as recommended in the Education 2030 Framework for Action (High-level political forum on SD, 2019).

Despite important progress in the Asia-Pacific, most countries in the region are off-track to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) targets on education (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021). Violence in education is still widespread in some countries (such as Afghanistan, India, and Myanmar), a severe shortage of qualified teachers (such as in Lao, Maldives, and Tajikistan), and significant gender disparities in education remain within the region (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021).

South Asia still lags far behind in terms of literacy rates, and it is in a learning crisis (Asadullah et al., 2020). Data on female literacy shows that the learning profile of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal has not improved over time (ibid, 2020).

Sri Lanka has been implementing free education since the 1940s enabling access to education for all from Grade 1 to university education. The free education system in Sri Lanka has contributed to the country's high Human Development Index (HDI), positioning Sri Lanka at 72 out of 189 countries in 2020 with a 92.4 % adult literacy rate in 2020 (UNDP, 2023).

There are 10,155 government schools, with 4,063,685 children and 249,494 teachers in Sri Lanka (Annual School Census of Sri Lanka, 2020). In addition, 90 government-approved private schools, 30 special education schools, and 816 Pirivenas are

functioning with the support of the government, and around 300 'International Schools' are registered under the company law but are not regulated by the Ministry of Education (Annual School Census of Sri Lanka, 2020).

Even though Sri Lanka has been practicing free education from Grade 1 to the university level since the late 1940s, it is doubtful whether the government will be able to achieve every aspect of SDG 04 by 2030.

The government of Sri Lanka has taken initial steps to implement the SDG Agenda, however, several implementation challenges remain. Specifically, some of the SDG implementation challenges for Sri Lanka are ensuring the alignment of national policies with the SDGs, institutional coherence, financing, partnerships, and multi-stakeholder participation, as well as data deficits (Tilakaratna et al., 2017). In addition, more investments are required to achieve SDG 04. National expenditure on education remains less than 2 percent of GDP (Annual Performance Report - Ministry of Education, 2020).

Even though there are 88 institutions relevant to implementing SDG 04 in Sri Lanka, it seems that no respective authority has yet incorporated SDG 04 targets and indicators in their strategic plans (Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform, 2018). Therefore, better governance in the education sector has become problematic.

Beyond the compulsory age of 14, a decline in school attendance is seen in every district. Nearly 36,000 students of compulsory age are dropping out of the formal education system at various levels (Ministry of Education, 2018). Furthermore, 15 percent of the over 300,000 students who enter school each year drop out before they sit for their G.C.E. Ordinary level examination, and only 60 percent pass that examination and qualify for G.C.E. Advanced level. Among them, only 19 percent of students are eligible to enter university (Ministry of Education, 2018). The majority of students have left school without learning the basics of mathematics, language, science, and digital literacy (Nithlavarnan et al., 2017), and due to the poor quality of education youth are increasingly leaving the sector but are ill-equipped when competing in the paid labor market (UN Sri Lanka, 2018).

After independence, although various policies have succeeded in providing universal access to free education, there have been regional and other disparities in the quality of education services to ensure equitable access to education.

Geographical spread, terrain issues, school capacity, and the proportion of rural students in the district also show spatial disparities in access and they have led to differences in enrolment rates (Ministry of Education, 2018). There are several districts where more than 2/3rds of the existing schools do not even have Advanced Levels on offer (Sarma, 2018). In areas such as Monaragala, Anuradhapura, and Puttalam, children from rural areas find it difficult to access schools due to the large geographical spread of the district, where the distance to secondary-level schools increases (ibid, 2018). Ministry of Education has categorized the school by geographical and socio-economic status. Accordingly, there are 2031 difficult schools and 1325 very difficult schools, particularly in war-affected areas in the country (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Ministry of Education (2020) revealed that even though the government has taken several initiatives to improve access and participation in education, still there are gaps which need to be filled to succeed. These gaps are learning difficulties, illness and disabilities, lack of facilities for differently abled students, child labor and household commitments, parents' ignorance, cultural variations among different ethnic groups, teacher deficiencies in rural schools, less attractive curriculum and delivery methods, gaps between curriculum and labor market expectations, less attractive teaching and learning methodology, less attention paid for improving socio-emotional skills of students based on their ages, examination-oriented education and highly competitive examinations, and teacher motivation on the less development of their professional capacities" (Ministry of Education, 2020). In improving the quality of education, it is important to enhance the quality of the teachers as well. Around 85 percent of teachers in the primary and lower-secondary levels have received at least the minimum organized teacher training, while around 24 percent of upper-secondary level teachers fail to meet this qualification (Tilakaratna & Sooriyamudali, 2019). There is a huge knowledge gap between education officials and teachers on SDG 04 (Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform, 2018). Another issue is that the curriculums are focused on preparing students for university admission, not providing a foundation for success. Furthermore, the curriculum does not take into account different types of learners and special needs (Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform, 2018).

As per Nithlavarnan et al. (2017), compared with other countries, Sri Lanka is far behind in focusing on the Education for Sustainable Development initiatives and is challenged with the task of embedding at national, school, and subject levels. 'Sri Lanka has the highest literacy rate in South Asia, yet it is unable to develop the fundamentals to create a sustainable and progressive education system' (Mahibalan, 2022). Even though Sri Lanka has a free education system, achieving SDG 04 poses a problematic situation.

COVID-19 has caused a crisis in education worldwide as well as in Sri Lanka. When schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students from privileged backgrounds had access to alternative learning options, but poor students faced many difficulties (Sandeepani et al., 2021). On average, less than 50 percent of students were reached online (Abayasekara & Silva, 2021). Only 48 percent of households with school-aged children owned a smartphone or computer and only 34 percent had an internet connection, primarily via mobile phones (ibid, 2021). Although equal rights are guaranteed to all students through free education, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis seems to have led to inequality in the education system (Sandeepani et al., 2021).

There is evidence that Sri Lanka has taken various initiatives to achieve SDG 04, but it is still a challenging situation where it is questionable whether the desired goals could be achieved at a satisfactory level by 2030. Although several studies have been conducted on SDG 4 at the international level, only a few research have been conducted in Sri Lanka. However, the preparedness to achieve education-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka has not been empirically examined and this study intends to fill that respective research gap.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the preparedness to achieve SDG 04, identify challenges and difficulties in achieving them, propose policy measures to enhance the preparedness levels and address the problems and difficulties in achieving SDG-04 in Sri Lanka by 2030.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews related literature on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), preparedness, and best practices of SDG 04 at the national and international level.

2.1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is framed by 5 key objectives:

(1) People - to end poverty and hunger; (2) Planet - to protect the planet from degradation (3) Prosperity - to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives (4) Peace - to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies and (5) Partnership - to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017).

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are defined in a list of 169 SDG Targets. Progress towards these Targets has been agreed to be tracked by 232 unique Indicators (UNDP, 2015). The SDGs were born at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which started a global effort in 2000 to

tackle the indignity of poverty and the SDGs are also an urgent call to shift the world onto a more sustainable path (UNDP, 2015).

2.1 Preparedness

The term 'preparedness' refers to the ability of governments, professional response organizations, communities, and individuals to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of likely, imminent, or current hazards, events, or conditions (UN-OCHA, 2021). The preparation for the implementation of the SDGs involves, three major stages Identify Priorities for Implementation, Developing a National Strategy, and Institutional Arrangement (National Audit Office – Republic of Mauritius, 2019). Some of the barriers to preparedness for SDG 04 are lack of financial support, lack of resources, complex bureaucracy, and rigid structures, the lack of commitment, engagement, awareness, interest, and involvement, lack of training, and lack of coordination (Adhikari & Shah, 2021). Long-term planning, responsibilities, coordination, integration and coherence, vertical integration, stakeholder engagement, budget, and monitoring and evaluation are the factors of preparedness of governments to implement the SDGs (Blanc, 2018).

2.2 Preparedness of SDG 04 in the World

Universities all over the nation have incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their curricula, study, and community engagement since 2015 (Alaoui, 2021). The SDGs are now second nature to many college students as a result of regional advocacy efforts, new curricula, partnerships, and the deliberate efforts of teachers and staff, and through the framework, universities are engaging students and staff to find creative solutions for building more inclusive, resilient communities while also working in partnership with local governments and businesses to help achieve the SDGs starting in their communities (ibid, 2021).

‘In South-East countries are also very remarkable as each country has its preparedness programs for achieving SDG 04. The differences in the application of each country are based on the different contexts faced by its respective government, the purpose is to obtain effective output and improve the education quality (Ghazali, 2021).

2.3 Best Practices

Some countries have initiated several programs and practices related to SDG 04 key areas which are summarized in the following table.

Table 01: Best Practices of SDG 04 in the World

Country	Actions were taken to achieve SDG 04	Related SDG
		04 key area
UNICEF	The Learning Passport is an Online, Mobile, and Offline 'education model' for all levels of education, tailored to the needs of out-of-school students, teachers, and parents to receive the necessary training and tools.	Inclusiveness
The United Kingdom	Game Changer Innovation Program - Durham University in the UK has launched a Game Changer program using 'design thinking' to find solutions to the SDGs and it enables students to be global citizens and leaders to deliver SDGs.	Life-long learning opportunities
Denmark	SDG-focused university - In 2019, the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) declared itself an 'SDG-focused university'. Since 2020, SDU has been actively working for the integration of 'SDG education' into the study programs offered by the university.	Quality education
Indonesia	SINERGI Project - Inclusive Approach to Open More Access - The SINERGI Project identified a need for improved multi-stakeholder coordination to access educational and employment opportunities and identified that training centers and companies needed to assess their teaching methods and working environments to support social inclusion.	Inclusiveness, equitable and lifelong learning opportunities
Finland	Studies for Sustainable Future - The University of Eastern Finland (UEF) seeks to integrate the Elements of SD into teaching materials and methods to educate students in thesis supervision by the university's curriculum guidelines. The integration aims to ensure that every student is comprehensively educated about SD.	Quality education

Germany	Virtual Academy for Sustainability - The Virtual Academy for Sustainability (VAS) of the University of Bremen aims to support Higher Education Institutions in implementing Sustainable Development Goals through online courses.	Inclusiveness
India	Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana – Bihar- A program in Bihar state provided a bicycle to every girl entering grade 9 or 10, and the National Mahila Shakti Kendra initiative supported village-level Women Empowerment Centers to reduce their dropout rates.	Inclusiveness and equitable
	‘Each One Teach One Method’ – Mizoram- a systematic effort which was made to identify illiterates in far-flung villages. Once these villages are spotted, then some volunteers are labeled as animators and are appointed, and simultaneously village adult education committees are formed to oversee the entire project.	Inclusiveness and equitable
	Saakshar Bharat – Sustaining and Enhancing Efforts in Adult Education. This program has facilitated opportunities for continuing education by extending educational options to adults who have dropped out of or have never entered the formal education system.	Inclusiveness, equitable and life-long learning opportunities

Source: Based on www.learningpassport.org (2023); UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022); Colella et al. (2022); Pandey (2018)

3. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methods using both primary and secondary data. Nearly, 88 institutions engage in achieving quality education in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Education, 2020). Among these organizations, 15 responsible organizations were selected that were included in the Agency Framework for implementing SDGs that were developed by the Sustainable Development Council in Sri Lanka. Preparedness level was examined in terms of several criteria, namely, Awareness level of SDG, Training regarding SDG goals, Resource availability, and Collaboration with other related organizations which is based on the discussions of National Audit Office (Republic of Mauritius, 2019; Adhikari & Shah, 2021; Blanc,

2018). Accordingly, the interview guidelines were prepared. In-depth interviews were conducted to identify the awareness level of responsible organizations on SDGs, the financial and physical resources available to implement the SDGs, and challenges and difficulties in achieving SDGs. One responsible officer who is at the top level of the organization was interviewed from each organization. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section examines the preparedness level for achieving SDG-04 and identifies problems and difficulties in achieving SDG 4 in Sri Lanka by 2030.

4.1 Initiated Programs and Practices in Achieving SDG 04

The government of Sri Lanka has initiated several steps to initiate the policy and organizational structure to address SDG4 in line with the SDGs. The following table presents these efforts:

Table 02: Organizations and Acts Established by the Government of Sri Lanka to Implement the SDG Agenda

Relevant Organizations and Act	Role
Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Regional Development	This Ministry was established in 2015 as a line ministry that is responsible for Sustainable Development and enactment of the Sustainable Development Act, No.19 of 2017. The Ministry coordinated and facilitated their implementation until the establishment of the Sustainable Development Council.
Sustainable Development Act No. 19 of 2017 and National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development	This Act was enforced in October 2017 to provide the legal framework to implement the SDGs with improved institutional and policy coherence. After that, the National Policy and Strategy was developed by the Sustainable Development Council.

Presidential Expert Committee (PEC) for Sustainable Development	This Committee was established in 2017 (PEC) and a chairman was appointed to prepare a report on the Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path.
Parliament Select Committee	This Committee was appointed in January 2017 to facilitate the implementation of SDGs to coordinate the activities of the Parliament with the respective Ministries and provide expert advice.

Source: Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path (2019)

Table 03 summarizes programs and practices initiated by selected organizations in addressing SDG 04.

Table 03: Programs and Practices Initiated in Achieving SDG 04

Organization	Initiated programs to achieve Key areas			
	Inclusive	Equitable	Quality education	Lifelong learning opportunities
Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing standards and curricula for disadvantaged and disabled groups. Enrolling physically challenged students in vocational education courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide flexible learning modes and adjustments for candidates who cannot fully engage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorses the quality of the documents and certificates. Develop their curricula with the support of the industry. Monitor the quality of the training programs Conduct Common knowledge assessments for some occupations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train the assertors to evaluate disabled candidate s.
National Institute of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing a department to direct school leavers to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upload all syllabuses on their website. Arrange self-learning modules for 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New reforms for providin g lifelong

	technical education.	every student.		learning opportu- nities
Children Secretariat	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of draft policy for equitable pre-primary education in collaboration with the National Education Commission. • Provide funds for Daycare centers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging provincial councils and other organizations to provide preschool teachers with training. • Facility improvement project for developing the infrastructures in the preschool. • Model village programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Teacher training, curriculum training, and activity-based learning circles
Ministry of Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community awareness programs • SDG web site, FB page 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising schools to conduct practical environmental programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct teacher training programs. • Conduct training programs for technical and vocational training students
National Education Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy proposals to ensure access to education, sanitation, resources, and technical facilities. 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying responsible policy planning organizations for quality education 	

Department of Technical & Vocational Education Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 39 training centers offer vocational courses in three languages.• Provide a scholarship for students (traveling pass, bursaries)• Provide allowance to students to motivate their attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct vocational training courses, especially for young women.• Conduct workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide e courses to help students prepare for the job market.• Training programs for instructors	
Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special courses for Disabled people• Conducting technical courses for Jail inmates• Conducting awareness programs for schoolchildren• Uploading technical courses to YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruiting candidates for technical courses without considering gender.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducting training programs for instructors	
Department of National Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A budget proposal for online education programs (Gurugedara, e-Thaksalawa)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget proposals for school uniform distribution, textbook distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A vocational education stream for higher education• Territory education has been made compulsory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget proposals for teacher training programs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal for increasing the university intake from 2020. • Special projects for technical education, STEM education (ADB-funded projects) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new strategies and programs for STEM education • Special plans and programs for education reforms 	
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thirteen years guaranteed education program in schools. • Mandate Schools to conduct based projects and provide funds for that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning remedies to help students with low proficiency. • Increment for vocationally trained students. • Formulate a policy for pre-primary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct formative tests to get feedback from students and identify their needs • Data collection programs • Programs related to vocational educational access. • Make a tool for collecting data on the proficiency level of grade 3 students Planning a parental guide
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training programs for teachers 	

Source: Field Data (2022, 2023)

5. Future Programs/Activities

In addition to the above-mentioned implemented programs, these responsible organizations have planned several programs/activities to achieve SDG 04.

Table 04: Future Programs/Activities

Organization	Future programs
National Institute of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan to establish a IAB school in every Divisional Secretariat • Change the exam-driven system and introduce a school-based performance system including project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and problem-based learning methods
Children Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a database system to evaluate the standards regarding the pre-education.
Ministry of Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An educational module for introduction to universities along with a five-year action plan • Future - Television programs • Training programs for trainers
National Education Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen their regulating process in the future. • Strengthening of the research areas
Department of Technical & Vocational Education Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan to provide training courses and develop access facilities for minor disability people
Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing new technical courses identified by their research department
Department of National Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education reform proposal with activity-based learning, early childhood education, rural sector education, and vocational education for school children
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan to conduct National assessment programs all over the country for Grade 3, Grade 6, and Grade 8 students. • Mid-decade assessment program in 2023

Source: Field Data (2022, 2023)

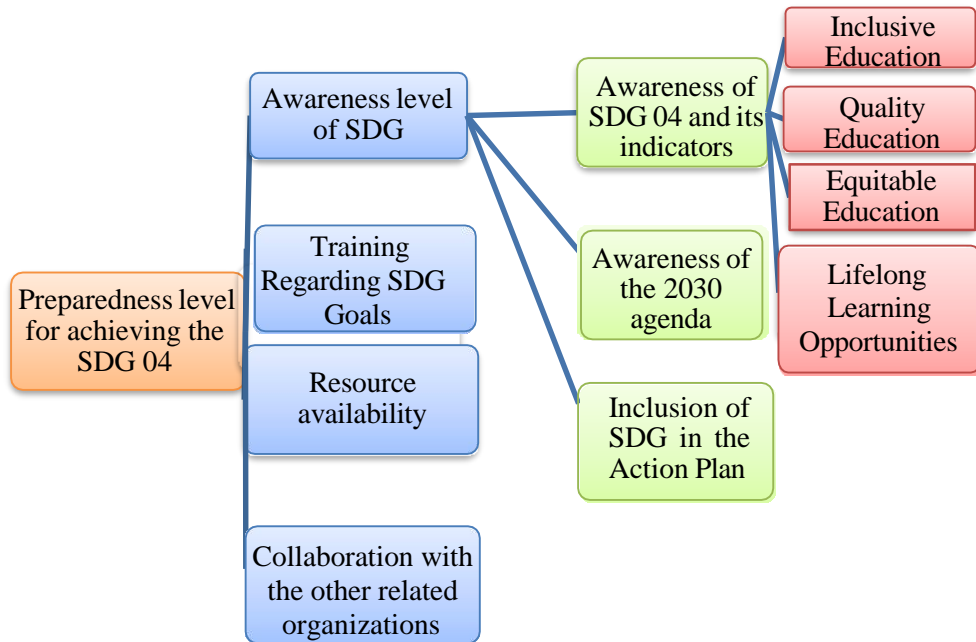
These selected organizations have already taken some activities to achieve SDG4. However, a comprehensive study with empirical data is required to assess the effectiveness of the program

5.1 Preparedness Level of Achieving SDG-04 Education in Sri Lanka by 2030

Several criteria namely, awareness, resource availability, training and collaboration, and coordination were used to examine the preparedness level (National Audit Office – Republic of Mauritius, 2019; Adhikari & Shah, 2021; Blanc, 2018). Based on the

following framework, the interview guidelines were designed. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify the preparedness level of the selected responsible organizations and the subsequent section presents the step-by-step process of the thematic analysis.

Figure 01: Analytical Framework for Examining Preparedness Level in Achieving the SDG 4.



Source: Based on Literature Review

Based on the Thematic analysis, four themes were identified namely, inadequate level of awareness of SDG, lack of proper training regarding SDG goals, lack of resource availability, and lack of collaboration with the other related organizations.

Under the inadequate level of awareness of SDG, the adequate level of awareness of the 2030 agenda, lack of awareness of SDG 04 and its indicators, and adequate level of inclusion of SDG in the action plan were considered.

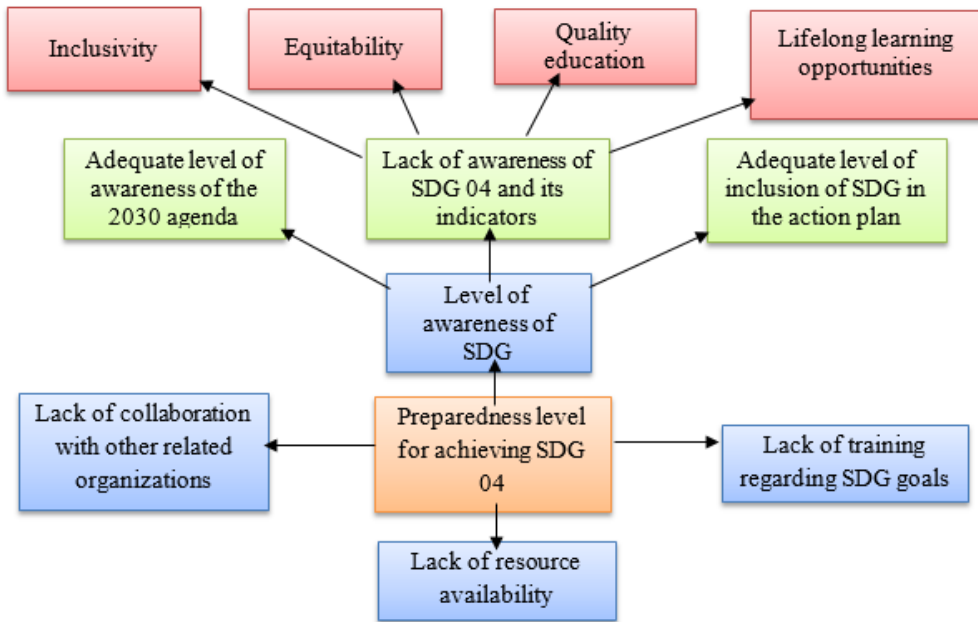
Table 05: Searching for Codes and Themes

<p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of the responsibility for formulating and implementing SDGs. • Included activities relating to the SDGs in annual action plans and policy decisions. • Include SDG 04 targets and indicators in their action. • Lack of opportunity for everyone • Lack of equal education • Lack of receiving and access to equal education opportunities <p>Theme: Inadequate level of awareness of SDG</p>	<p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of in-depth training • Conduct some workshops. • Lack of effective training programs • Lack of quality of the documents and certificates, Quality of training programs • Make the student a "knowledge seeker." • Lack of identifying the capabilities of students and providing facilities for improving them • Lack of upgrading the skills <p>Theme: Lack of proper Training regarding SDG goals</p>	<p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need funds from NGOs. • Receive money from the consolidated fund. • Not receiving direct funds • Lack of financial resources • Insufficient salaries • Lack of investments • Outdated physical resources. • Lack of information and communication devices <p>Theme: Lack of Resource availability</p>
<p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct or indirect connection • Communication gaps <p>Theme: Lack of collaboration with the other related organizations</p>		

Source: Field Data

Based on the data analysis, the preparedness level of SDG 04 is presented in Figure 02.

Figure 02: Preparedness Level of SDG 04



Source: Field Data

The above-mentioned themes are described in brief in the proceeding section.

5.2 Inadequate Level of Awareness of SDG

The awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the inclusion of the SDGs in the action plan are at a satisfactory level. However, the awareness of SDG 04 and its indicators is not at a satisfactory level because most of the respondents do not have a clear idea about the key areas of SDG 04, including inclusiveness, equity, quality education, and lifelong learning opportunities.

5.3 Adequate Level of Awareness of the 2030 Agenda

All these responsible organizations have an awareness of the SDGs and are responsible for the formulation and implementation of the SDGs in Sri Lanka. The awareness of the SDG 2030 agenda through various ways such as documents on SDGs, agreements and circulars, and training programs. Some organizations have already focused on the SDGs in alignment with the existing government policy framework.

5.4 Adequate Level of Inclusion of SDG in the Action Plan

After endorsing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Government of Sri Lanka has taken several initiatives to facilitate its implementation. The selected organizations have included several activities related to the SDGs in their action plans. For example, the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission published a document in 2018 titled 'National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education' as its development plan (includes 09 sections). This tried to address SDG 04. Similarly, the Children's Secretariat approved the policy for the development of the pre-primary education sector in 2004. It was subsequently revised in 2016 to include the SDGs. Plans and programs covered by this policy are included in their annual plan. However, until 2017, the government had not made adequate effort in formulating a plan for SDGs. Sri Lanka had not taken sufficient steps to formulate the national policy and strategy on sustainable development, and alignment of targets with the Public Investment Programme (PIP) including education (Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Regional Development, 2018).

5.5 Lack of Awareness of SDG 04 and Its Indicators

The awareness of SDG 04 and its indicators (Inclusive, Equitable, Quality Education, and Lifelong Learning Opportunities) was not adequate since most of the respondents did not have a clear idea about these key areas of SDG 04.

5.6 Lack of Training Regarding SDG Goals

Most of the officers in these selected organizations have not received any training programs on SDGs. Several officers had undergone some training; however, the effectiveness of these training programs was marginal, and also these officials were shown very enthusiasm to have necessary training on SDGs.

A few organizations have received training on how to achieve SDGs and those training programs were conducted by the Secretariat of Sustainable Development in Sri Lanka, they have joined with the Sustainable Development Council for some review programs.

The SDG Learning, training, and Practice depend on the commitment of partners to the SDGs and their willingness to share their knowledge with experts all over the world (Division for Sustainable Development Goals – UN (2022).

5.7 Lack of Resource Availability

SDG4 is less than 80% aligned with the Public Investment Programs (PIPs) public finance projects and programs (Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and

Regional Development, 2018). However, the government's spending on education as a percentage of GDP has declined from 1.99% in 2016 to 1.85% in 2021 (Sustainable Development Council Sri Lanka, 2022).

5.8 Lack of Financial Resources

Several organizations have received funds from the treasury and other sources such as NGOs, World Bank, etc. However, they are still facing difficulties with financial resources due to the prevailing economic crisis in the country. In that context, these organizations were unable to implement their programs relating to the SDGs as scheduled. Some institutes attached to the vocational education sector provide practical courses for students. Due to financial problems, they were unable to pay their instructors and even some instructors have not been paid properly.

Among these responsible institutions, several institutions conduct surveys related to SDG 04. They research to ensure access to quality education and to know the issues and problems when implementing educational policies. However, due to a lack of financial resources, those organizations were unable to conduct surveys related to the SDGs.

5.9 Lack of Physical Resources

Most of the responsible organizations face difficulties with outdated and lack of physical resources like buildings and technical equipment. Often vocational institutes face this problem because they have training centers and need adequate buildings to run their activities. Sometimes, disabled candidates attend their courses, and they require special facilities (e.g. sanitary facilities and accessibility facilities). Some organizations do not have enough internet facilities and ICT equipment in their workplace.

Resource availability in terms of financial resources and physical resources is not adequate.

5.10 Lack of Collaboration with the Other Related Organizations

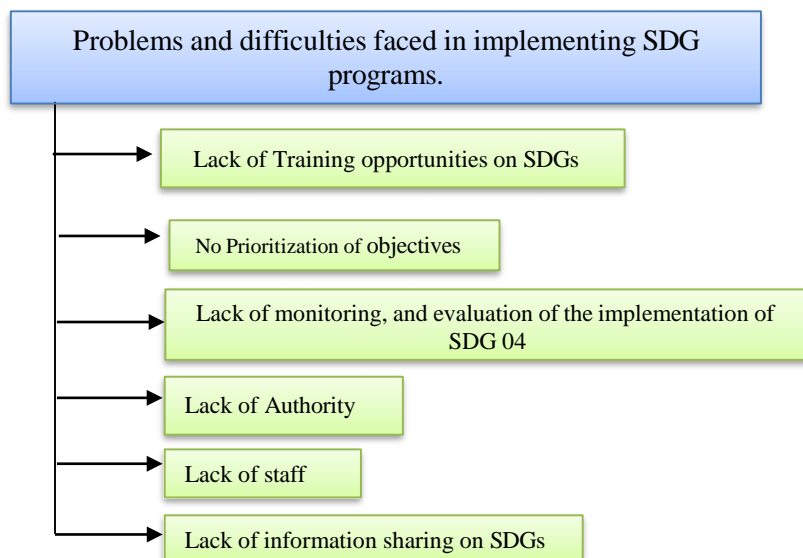
Education is a broad scope. Hence, no single organization can implement and achieve SDG 04 alone and all responsible organizations must work collaboratively. At the implementation of SDGs, there should be proper coordination among the responsible institutions that are required for the success of the programs of SDGs. 'Interconnected practices are essential for policymaking, planning, and implementation in the education field' (Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path, 2019).

There were communication gaps between several institutions, thus, proper coordination among these organizations is essential that help share best practices. The division of the education portfolio into different sub-sectors and the lack of communication between the respective authorities have resulted in inconsistent and contradictory policies and practices across the education sector (Sustainable Sri Lanka 2030 Vision and Strategic Path, 2019). Collaboration among related organizations was not at a satisfactory level.

6. Problems and Difficulties Faced in Implementing SDG Programs

Identified problems and difficulties faced in implementing SDG programs are shown in Figure 03.

Figure 03: Problems and Difficulties Faced in Implementing SDGs Programs



Source: Field Data

6.1 Lack of Training Opportunities on SDGs

Responsible institutions need better training opportunities regarding the SDGs. Only a few institutions have received training opportunities including foreign training, but most of the institutions have not received any training, and some of the training programs were not very effective. The officials lack training on how to gain awareness, and design, implement, monitor, and evaluate the SDG policies and programs.

6.2 No Prioritization of Objectives

Although responsible institutions have made some initiatives to adopt the SDGs, it is required to prioritize these goals considering the existing goals of the organizations. As the implementation of SDG 04 is only a part of their action plan, these organizations need to focus on the existing vision and objectives, and because of that, SDG 04 has received less attention. Sometimes the organizational objectives overlap with the SDG objectives which negatively affects the performance of their organizational performance.

6.3 Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation of the Implementation of SDG 04

Some selected institutions conduct surveys to identify problems and issues of implementing, monitoring, and evaluating SDG programs. Due to the lack of financial resources, and other constraints, these organizations face difficulties in conducting their surveys/feedback properly. If they get adequate funding, they could identify problems in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating SDG programs leading to the success of the implementation of SDGs.

6.4 Lack of Authority

Sometimes SDG 04 cannot be properly implemented due to inadequate authority. Several educational institutions in Sri Lanka are being regulated by different authorities. For example, public schools are regulated by the central government or the provincial council, and international schools are regulated under the Companies Act. Therefore, responsible institutions face several problems such as issues of collection of data and information, regulation, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of implementing SDG 04 due to the lack of authority from one authorized institute.

The main authorized body for SDG implementation in Sri Lanka is the Sustainable Development Council and its responsibilities are to coordinate, facilitate, monitor, evaluate, and report the implementation of SDGs in Sri Lanka. Due to several reasons (high labor turnover, lack of expert people in the council), this organization has failed to perform its functions properly. The Sustainable Development Council as the main authorizing body should regulate all the responsible institutions of SDG 04 for the proper implementation of SDG 04. However, their roles, the capacity of the officers, and the powers of the organization are not adequate.

6.5 Lack of Staff

Most of the selected responsible institutions do not have adequate staff to implement SDG 04-related activities thus, implementation of SDG 04 has become difficult. Some vocational education institutions face various difficulties due to financial constraints. Hence, their instructors frequently leave their jobs and as a result, these organizations recruit visiting staff to conduct their programs. The Sustainable Development Council faces difficulties in carrying out its roles and responsibilities in implementing SDGs.

6.6 Lack of Information Sharing on SDGs

There is no proper mechanism to share relevant and useful information and data such as policy formulation, implementation, monitoring feedback, and evaluation.

The Second Voluntary National Review Sri Lanka Report (2022) noted that there are limitations in collection, validation, and access to data and face challenges in policy formulation and interventions. This report also revealed that education systems need to monitor beyond their administrative data and be able to implement policies targeting all children, and also it requires comparing Education Management Information System (EMIS) data to national population-level data.

7. Policy Implications

Policy measures are discussed to address the problems and to enhance the preparedness level to achieve SDG 04 in 2030.

7.1 Conduct Effective Training Programs

Proper training programs need to be conducted in implementing SDG plans. These training programs could be organized locally and internationally in collaboration with

related organizations to gain knowledge on how to successfully implement the SDGs and get awareness about the best practices from other countries. These training programs need to be evaluated to ensure the effectiveness of them. Those officers should receive relevant training based on the world's best practices of SDGs.

7.2 Conduct Monitoring and Evaluation Programs

To identify issues and problems during the implementation and after the implementation of SDG 04, monitoring and evaluation programs need to be conducted. Further, adequate financial resources and other facilities should be provided to responsible institutions to conduct these surveys, evaluation studies, and feedback programs.

7.3 Recruitment of New Staff

Vocational education institutions in particular face human resource management issues as there are lack of instructors in the technical subjects. Thus, fresh graduates from technical faculties can be recruited to vocational education institutions with a proper salary scale.

7.4 Establish a better Mechanism for Data Sharing

Proper data-sharing mechanisms related to SDG4 among responsible organizations are essential since each of these organizations has gathered useful information and data such as data and information related to their plans, programs, best practices, education policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation and that information can be important to other responsible agencies for conducting g their activities. However, officials are reluctant to share information due to the absence of a secure mechanism for the sharing of information.

7.5 Provide Adequate Physical Resources

Lack of physical resources is a common problem faced by the selected organizations. Hence, the government needs to provide adequate building facilities, technical equipment, internet facilities, ICT equipment, and other essential physical resources to those institutions. In particular, sanitary facilities and accessibility facilities need to be provided for disabled candidates to increase their participation in education, since 'Universal basic education goals could not be achieved without providing educational opportunities for differently abled children' (Annual Performance Report - Ministry of Education, 2020).

7.6 Maintain Appropriate Collaboration with the other Related Organizations

There should be better coordination and collaboration among the responsible institutions to achieve SDG 04. Accordingly, each responsible institution could cooperate with other related institutions, and communicate their plans and programs. This is especially important in the planning and implementation stages.

7.7 Conduct a National Assessment on Preparedness Level

Although responsible organizations have initiated several plans and programs to achieve SDG 04 in Sri Lanka, there is no proper assessment of the level of preparedness for achieving SDG 04. It is necessary to implement a national survey covering all responsible institutions as the 2030 SDG Agenda is less than 7 years from being achieved. This national assessment should cover the availability of financial and physical resources, the level of awareness of SDG 04, and the issues and difficulties faced by each responsible institution in implementing SDG 04.

7.8 Need to Strengthen an Authorized Institution

All responsible educational institutions are regulated by different authorities, but SDG 04 could not be implemented properly due to the lack of authority. There should be an exclusive authorized and regulatory body to regulate all other organizations responsible for achieving SDG 04 in Sri Lanka. Currently, the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka is the authorized body for the implementation of the SDGs in Sri Lanka. But this organization should be strengthened in terms of financial resources, and capacity development with training programs to enhance the knowledge and skills of officials who are responsible for achieving the SDGs. For that, qualified and experienced resource persons should be recruited, and the activities of the council should be monitored and evaluated. There should also be strong alignment, rules, and regulations from the ministerial level in implementing the SDGs. While there is a common roadmap for the SDGs, there should be a separate roadmap for each goal.

8. Conclusion

This study examines the preparedness level in achieving SDG-04 in Sri Lanka by 2030, identifying challenges and difficulties, and proposes policy measures to improve the preparedness level in achieving SDG-04 in Sri Lanka by 2030. The preparedness was examined in terms of awareness, resource availability, training

regarding SDG goals, and collaboration with other related organizations. Adequate awareness about the 2030 agenda and an adequate level of inclusion of the SDGs in the action plan were exhibited among the elected officials. The awareness about SDG 04 and its indicators, resource availability, training regarding SDG goals, and collaboration with other related organizations are lacking.

Further, training opportunities, prioritization of objectives, monitoring and evaluating of implementation of SDG 04 authority issues, shortages of staff, and lack of information sharing on SDGs were identified as the main problems and difficulties faced by these organizations who are responsible for the implementation of SDG programs.

Compared to other developing countries, Sri Lanka has made significant progress in the education sector, and some responsible officials have perceived that Sri Lanka could achieve SDG 04 in 2030. Sri Lanka has shown some progress in the field of education as a country where free education has been implemented since independence, there may be a possibility of achieving SDG 04 by 2030 to a satisfactory level if the initiated programs are implemented efficiently. But 100% completion of SDG 04 by 2030 could not be guaranteed. If the current programs are conducted efficiently, SDG 04 could be completed at a significant level. Conducting effective training programs, improving the field of research on SDG 04, recruiting new staff, establishing a proper mechanism for data sharing on SDG 04, providing adequate physical resources, maintaining an appropriate collaboration with the other related organizations, conducting a National assessment on preparedness level to achieve SDG 04 and establishing an authorized and regulatory institution are policy measures to address the problems and also to enhance the preparedness level to achieve SDG 04 in 2030.

9. Limitations and Further Research

This study focused only on SDG 04, however, since a comparison of all the sustainable objectives reveals that they are all similar in relevance, future studies might focus on the implementation of other SDGs. In Sri Lanka, several responsible organizations are involved in implementing SDG 4. Due to time constraints and financial constraints, this study only covered 15 responsible organizations which have been included in the agency framework of the implementing SDGs and its sub-indicators in Sri Lanka and this framework has been prepared by the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka. Therefore, future research can be conducted by covering other responsible organizations.

9.1 Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation: Case Study of Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka

G. K. A. Sewwandi

Sri Lanka Administrative Service
sewwandigka1990@gmail.com

L. A. Pavithra Madhuwanthi

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
pavithra@sjp.ac.lk

Abstract

Rural development projects are advancing slowly in rural areas partly due to a lack of community participation in project implementation. In the Sri Lankan context, state-governed projects are often planned by the Ministries and Departments, yet beneficiaries get the chance to engage with projects at the implementation stage. Divisional Secretariats play a major role when implementing projects at the rural level in Sri Lanka. Hence, this study aims to explore the reasons for lower community participation in rural development project implementation in a selected divisional secretariat called Kandaketiya in Sri Lanka, to examine issues encountered in community participation in rural development project implementation, and to make suggestions to increase active community participation. The study used a qualitative case study design by collecting data from the field officers engaged in rural project implementation and community members separately. Six focus group discussions were employed, and data analysis was done thematically. As the reasons for lower community participation, the study found that lack of awareness, negative community perception, administrative and management issues of government institutes, time constraints, geographical barriers, and limited infrastructure availability. The study revealed that issues encountered in community participation in rural development project implementation as intergenerational conflicts and poor teamwork, insufficient monitoring by field officers, poor officer-community relationship, and lack of transparency in financial matters. Introducing a daily wage system, enhancing communication facilities, conducting need analysis tests, increasing financial transparency, conducting community awareness and capacity-building training for officers, and introducing people-centric project designs were stated as suggestions for increasing community participation.

Keywords: Community Participation, Project Implementation, Rural Development

1. Introduction

In the Sri Lankan context, rural development has been identified as one prominent area for reaching developmental goals due to primary-level production occurs at the rural level and most of the natural resources are available far away from urban cities (National Physical Planning Department, 2019). Generally, in Sri Lanka state-governed projects are planned by higher officials yet beneficiaries get the chance to engage with projects in the implementation stage (Yalegama, Chileshe, & Ma, 2016). State-level rural development projects are planned by Ministries and Departments (Kruse, 2007; National Physical Planning Department, 2019). Divisional Secretariats play a major role under the direction of the District Secretariat when implementing projects at the field level in Sri Lanka (Samarasinghe, 2014; Kruse, 2007). There are field officers such as Grama Niladhari (Rural Officer), Development officers, Samurdhi Development officers, etc. to implement, monitor, and control the project-based activities at the rural level. Community at the village level are motivated by a wide range of factors to initiate and participate in rural development projects. Community support is an inevitable strategy to overcome difficulties and reach the outcomes of the projects. Though the higher authority of the government has planned the projects, beneficiaries of the project can tremendously impact the project's success based on active participation at the implementing stage. All these projects are aimed at uplifting the living conditions of rural beneficiaries.

Rural development initiatives in their particular communities are advancing slowly due to lack of engagement (Kritzinger-Van Niekerk, & Govender, 2015). These initiatives with limited community participation are not meeting their objectives. Numerous studies have been performed to investigate the low level of community engagement in the planning phase of development projects. Few studies have been conducted on the variables influencing poor community participation during the implementation phase of rural development initiatives (Khan, & Qureshi, 2016).

Particularly in the case of Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariate Division (DSD), it was found that several rural development projects have been implemented such as household agricultural projects, community projects to delist the lakes and irrigation channel, community water projects, the construction of bridges, and roads, Shramadana campaign, etc. (Divisional Secretariat Kandaketiya, 2022). According to the resource profile of the Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariat, the following projects have been carried out by the Kandaketiya DSD during the past few years (Table 01). However, it was reported that the number of actual beneficiaries participating in all

those projects is much less than the targeted beneficiaries. It indicated that though the benefits derived from those projects are for the community, their participation in such project implementation is at an unsatisfactory level leaving a gap to explore reasons for lower community participation in rural development project implementation.

Table 01: Projects Implemented in Kandaketiya DSD during 2018-2022

Project name	No. of Target Beneficiaries	No. of Participated Beneficiaries	Funding Agents
A community project to delist the Kuda Ela Irrigation channel	199 farmers	14 farmers	Community funds
Providing clean drinking water using a tube well (Bokanoruwa)	30 families	20 families	Government
Construction of road towards the bridge (Udakiwlegedara- Maladumgolla)	107 families	35 beneficiaries	Community funds
Home-based cultivation project (26 GND)	3900 households	570 households	Government
Dengu Shramadana Campaign (Havandana)	1061 beneficiaries	78 beneficiaries	Non- Government Agency

Source: Resource Profile, Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariat (2018-2022)

Lack of community participation poses significant challenges to the successful implementation and sustainability of projects aimed at addressing community needs and improving socio-economic conditions. Hence, exploring and understanding the reasons for lower community participation is essential for designing effective policy interventions to enhance community participation in rural project implementation. In this context, this study attempts to fulfil the following research objectives.

1. To examine the reasons for lower community participation in project implementation in Kandaketiya DSD.

2. To find out issues encountered in community participation in rural development project implementation in Kandaketiya DSD.
3. To propose policy measures to increase active community participation in rural development project implementation in Kandaketiya DSD.

Community participation is critical for the long-term sustainability of rural development projects. By studying factors influencing participation, policymakers and other stakeholders can work to foster greater ownership and accountability within communities as well as establish strategies to enhance the effectiveness of rural development projects. As most newly planned projects follow a participatory project approach, it is highly important to make a platform to identify the reasons, and issues of the lower community participation in project implementation.

Research on community participation in rural development projects can contribute to the broader knowledge base on participatory development approaches, benefiting both academia and practitioners. This knowledge can be shared across contexts and used to inform future research and programming in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Succinctly, studying lower community participation in rural development projects in Kandaketiya DSD in Sri Lanka is significant for improving the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of development efforts, empowering local communities, and informing policy and practice in the field of rural development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Participation in Rural Development Projects

Modern theories on rural improvement place a premium on public involvement (Sabet & Khaksar, 2020). Rahnema (2020) found that there is growing agreement that people's active engagement is crucial to the success of any initiative aimed at progress. The current worries about participation have deep historical roots. Fu & Geng (2019) state that at every stage of rural development in postcolonial Asia and Africa, the voice of the people has been a continuous motif. Depending on the nature of the development programs and activities, "the people" can refer to a wide range of demographics, including but not limited to the intended audience, clientele, beneficiaries, men, women, young, old, formal, and informal community leaders, and members of various community segments and strata. By contributing their ideas, interest, material, money, and time, people are full partners with development agencies in determining programs and activities, setting priorities, taking the lead, and carrying out initiatives. According to Mitra (2021), the extent to which people

participate is determined by several factors, including the type of activity, how long it takes to carry out, how technical is it, to whom to serve (whether it is for a targeted group or the entire community), where it is located, how much money is at stake, and what are the requirements of the development agencies.

2.2 Theoretical Background

2.2.1 Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Actor Network Theory (ANT) explains the relationships between actors (both human and non-human) in various networks. In the context of rural development project implementation, ANT helps to analyze the dynamics and interactions between different actors involved in the process, such as government agencies, NGOs, local communities, and resources. When it comes to lower community participation in rural development projects, ANT can shed light on the reasons behind this phenomenon and helps to identify the key actors that influence community involvement, such as power dynamics, resource distribution, communication channels, and conflicting interests (Latour, 2005). Further, the theory helps Stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of the complex network of relationships and develop strategies to enhance community participation. This may involve addressing power imbalances, improving communication channels, building trust between actors, and involving local communities in decision-making processes (Latour, 2005). Overall, the relevance of Actor-Network Theory in understanding lower community participation in rural development project implementation lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive perspective on the interactions and relationships that shape the success or failure of such initiatives.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory is a management theory that focuses on the relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, including individuals or groups who have an interest in or are affected by the organization's actions. In the context of rural development project implementation, it can be highly relevant in understanding and addressing lower community participation (Bonnafous-Bouc & Rendtoff, 2016). Stakeholder Theory also highlights the need for effective communication, collaboration, and relationship-building with stakeholders to foster trust, transparency, and mutual understanding. By involving local communities in decision-making processes, listening to their feedback, and incorporating their perspectives into project planning and implementation, stakeholders can increase community ownership and participation in rural development initiatives (Bonnafous-Bouc & Rendtoff, 2016).

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and engaging with all relevant stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and other organizations involved in the project. By recognizing the interests, concerns, and expectations of these stakeholders, project implementers can better understand the reasons behind low community participation and work toward solutions that address these issues (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

The relevance of Stakeholder Theory in addressing lower community participation in rural development project implementation lies in its emphasis on stakeholder engagement, relationship management, and inclusive decision-making processes. By applying Stakeholder Theory principles, project implementers can create a more participatory and sustainable development approach that benefits all stakeholders involved (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

2.3 Empirical Evidence on Community Participation in Rural Development

The results of a study conducted by Oedl-Wieser, Dax, & Fischer, (2017) in Georgia using participative methods for rural development, despite high hopes, found that community engagement is challenging to achieve in development projects. Similarly, a previous study conducted by Narayan & Lutz (1998) in India, revealed that determining the best way to incorporate the villagers, particularly the impoverished ones, in the whole development process, may be one of the challenges it faces. Poor people are less likely to take part in community activities, as noted by Cohen and Uphoff's (1980). Narayan & Lutz (1998) also argue that as a rule, those at the bottom of society's economic food chain lack the education and resources necessary to participate actively in their communities' political systems. Cohen and Uphoff's (1980) idea of participation may prove to be the most useful framework for rural development. Using a project cycle as a framework, Cohen and Uphoff (1980) describe participation as active involvement in all phases of rural development initiatives, from planning to implementation for reaping the benefits to assess the program's success. According to Nordberg et al. (2020) at every point in rural development, there are a wide variety of local traditions, customs, and projects that have their advantages and disadvantages when it comes to foster citizen participation in the process. It is believed that certain traditions, such as formality, discourage active participation. The accountability system is found to emphasize formal techniques, such as reporting to the district administration and village council, which harms the quality of participation.

3. Methodology

This qualitative research study is designed by a case study method in Kandaketiya DSD. Primary data were collected from six focus group discussions with the community members and field officers in Bokanoruwa, Kilwagedara, and Havandana Grama Niladari Divisions in the Kandaketiya DSD. The sample was selected using the convenient sampling technique (See Table 02). Each selected sample of the respective GN division consisted of 5 members of field officers and 5 members of community participants. Accordingly, a sample of Community members in each division was selected by considering participation in rural development projects during 2018-2022 in those selected areas. Two members actively participated in project implantation and 3 of them did not participate in community projects concerning each GND. The sample of officers in each GND consists of Grama Niladari(GN), an Economic Development Officer (EDO), an Agriculture Research Production Assistant (ARPA), and Midwives (MW) who are directly involved in community-based development projects in each GN division.

Table 02: Sample Selection for Focus Group Discussion

Strata	Bokanoruwa GND	Kiwlegedara GND	Havandana GND
Field Officers	5	5	5
Community Members	5	5	5
Total	10	10	10

Data Source: Field Data (2024)

Thematic analysis was carried out to offer a structured yet flexible approach that helps researchers make sense of qualitative data by identifying meaningful patterns and themes. Its versatility and focus on rich descriptions made it a valuable tool for uncovering insights in a wide range of research contexts in this study. To ensure the quality of the data, several measures were taken. First, the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) guide was pre-tested to ensure that the questions were clear and relevant to the study. Second, the moderator ensured that all participants had an equal opportunity to express their opinions and that the discussions remained focused on research questions.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings from this study are significant because they provide insights into the challenges of implementing rural development projects in the Kandaketiya DSD, particularly about community participation. The results can inform policy and practice to improve community engagement and participation in rural development projects, which could ultimately lead to more effective and sustainable development outcomes.

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 03 shows demographic characteristics of the participants who attended the focus group discussion of the community in Havandana, Bokanoruwa, and Kiwlegeara Grama Niladari divisions. The sample of community FGD consisted of both females and males. When considering occupations of the sample farming activities, laborers, government pensioners, private job holders as well as people who have no jobs are included. Education level was categorized as no education, primary education, grade 5 to 11, and above O/L. The sample of the community also consists of nonparticipants of community projects and participants for projects that are implemented in the 2018-2022 period.

Table 03: Data Gathered from FGD of Community Members

FGD	Participant No	Gender	Age	Occupation	Educational level	Participation in community projects 2018-2022
FGD 1- Community of Havandana GN division	Participant 1	Male	26	Farming	Up to O/L	Yes
	Participant 2	Female	42	No job	Pass grade 8	No
	Participant 3	Male	58	Farming	Primary education	Yes
	Participant 4	Male	62	Labor	Up to grade 1	No
	Participant 5	Female	42	Labor	Primary	No
FGD 2 - Community of Kiwle Gedara GN division	Participant 6	Male	43	Farming	Up to O/L	No
	Participant 7	Male	54	Farming	Pass grade 8	No
	Participant 8	Female	35	No job	Primary education	Yes

FGD 3 - Community of Bokanoruwa GN division	Participant 9	Female	66	Government pensioner	Pass the A/L	Yes
	Participant 10	Female	32	Private job at Garment	Pass grade 10	NO
	Participant 11	Male	60	Farming	No education	Yes
	Participant 12	Male	40	Farming	Pass grade 10	Yes
	Participant 13	Male	30	Daily wage labour	Pass grade 9	No
	Participant 14	Female	37	Housewife	Up to grade 1	No
	Participant 15	Female	51	Labor	Primary education	No

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 04 indicates a focus group discussion of field officers in Havandana, Bokanoruwa, and Kiwlegeara Grama Niladari divisions. The sample consists of both females and males. When considering working experience, it consists of below 5 years to above 15 years range.

Table 04: Data Gathered from FGD of Field Officers

FGD	Field Officer (FO)	Gender	Age	Working Experience in years
FGD 1- field officers of Havandana GN division	FO 1	Female	29	5
	FO 2	Female	37	2
	FO 3	Male	45	18
	FO 4	Male	37	11
	FO 5	Female	41	19
FGD 2 - field officers of Kiwle Gedara GN division	FO 6	Male	37	35
	FO 7	Male	36	12
	FO 8	Female	44	21
	FO 9	Male	51	25
	FO 10	Female	39	23

FGD 3- field officers of Bokanoruwa GN division	FO 11	Female	58	35
	FO 12	Male	40	12
	FO 13	Female	48	21
	FO 14	Female	51	25
	FO 15	Female	47	23

Source: Field Data (2024)

4.2 Reasons for Lower Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation

Data was gathered from field Officers and selected community participants under the first research objective. The following themes emerged from the data:

4.2.1 Ignorance Among the Rural Community in Rural Development

The theme highlights that individual with limited educational background and little exposure, particularly those who have not advanced beyond the General Certificate of Education - Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) encounter barriers to their engagement in community development initiatives. The lack of knowledge about economic matters and unawareness about developmental dynamics acts as a deterrent, inhibiting their inclination to participate actively in projects aimed at enhancing their community:

4.2.1.1 Lack of Education in The Rural Community

Many villagers have not pursued education beyond the General Certificate of Education - Ordinary Level (GCE O/L). This educational gap has resulted in a lack of familiarity with economic concepts, developmental aspects, and related matters concerning Kandakatiya:

"Most of the people in these areas have no proper education. They have primary education. They have no exposure to development societies. They don't have a sense of development. Such concepts like Development and sustainability are far from their knowledge and mindsets. They normally pay attention to their day-to-day activities and earnings only" (FO3).

4.2.1.2 Lack of Awareness Among the Rural Community

According to the officers and community members, it was revealed that unawareness and infrequent exposure to such development projects has led to poor participation among the community members in rural development project implementation.

4.2.2 Negative Perception of Rural Development

A significant number of individuals hold the belief that these regions are inherently incapable of development, and it is the responsibility of government-authorized officers. Consequently, they harbor a perspective that investing their time and efforts in enhancing these areas would yield minimal returns:

"We hold reservations about the potential success of development initiatives but due to existing obstacles we cannot achieve those goals, we have doubts about the efficacy of developmental efforts. We lack motivation to follow these development projects due to their unsuccessful behavior" (FO 2).

4.2.2.1 Skepticism Towards Rural Development Projects

The prevailing sentiment embedded in these direct statements suggests a shared belief that investing resources, such as time and effort, might not yield substantial improvements. This skepticism, shaped by perceived limitations and past experiences, contributes to a prevailing reluctance among community members to actively engage in developmental activities.

4.2.2.2 Belief That Developmental Projects Are Responsibility of Authorized Officers

Certain community members perceived that development efforts should solely be the domain of authorized officers, absolving the community from active involvement. This perception is rooted in the conviction that officers are remunerated for this task and, therefore, community members need not actively participate. This emphasizes the conviction that development initiatives fall under the purview of authorized officers:

"Authorized officers, are entrusted with the responsibility of development activities. They are paid for it. As a community, we cannot contribute to those activities due to our day-to-day activities. Project implementation is the duty of the officers" (Participant 9).

This perspective reflects a shared belief among participants, indicating an inclination to delegate development responsibilities to the appropriate officials. The direct statements from the people involved emphasize a consensus on the role of authorized officers, particularly officers, in leading and overseeing development activities.

4.2.3 Administrative Issues of the Government Authorities

A significant proportion of projects encounter hurdles, resulting in deviations from the initially outlined schedules. This disruption in project progression generates several problems that are coming from government authorities such as management and administrative issues.

Participants highlight challenges stemming from regulatory frameworks and managerial inefficiencies that hinder effective project execution. The direct statements from people affected highlight the tangible impact of project approval delays on the community's welfare and the broader development context:

"We face challenges arising from the government, they do not provide an exact timeline for when to start or finish, and some projects stop suddenly without any information due to money problems of any other. But those mistakes mislead our day-to-day earnings" (Participant 11).

The postponement of approval processes ripples into project implementation, disrupting subsequent phases. This cascading impact not only compounds community frustration but also underscores the urgency of streamlining project timelines. The direct statements from people affected highlight the interconnected nature of project phases and emphasize the critical need to address delays for a more effective and seamless implementation process:

"We face intricacies in obtaining approvals and permissions, often causing delays in the commencement of projects. Then we're witnessing diminishing levels of trust within the community because projects are not adhering to stipulated timelines" (FO1).

4.2.4 Time Constraints and Limited Participation in Rural Development Projects

Embedded within this theme underscores occupational engagements and personal commitments as primary reasons for not having adequate time to be involved in rural development projects.

4.2.4.1 Occupational Engagements

This leaves minimal room for individuals to allocate sufficient time toward community development endeavors. The direct statements from people, as conveyed by FO8, emphasize the considerable impact of occupational demands on individuals' inability to actively engage in community development activities:

"The demands of various occupations, particularly those involving demanding physical activities like farming, consume a substantial portion of their time" (FO8).

"The demands of our daily work, such as engaging in agricultural activities, significantly limit the time available for our participation" (Participant 13).

4.2.4.2 Personal Commitments

The delicate balance between personal obligations and community involvement emerges as a formidable challenge. The direct statements from people, and field officers, bring attention to the significant impact of domestic and family responsibilities on individuals' capacity to engage actively in community development projects:

"Villagers are occupied with domestic chores and family responsibilities, which limits their ability to allocate time for community development projects" (FO5).

4.2.5 Geographical Barriers and Challenges to Participation

The topographical features of mountains, off-road areas, rivers, and forested regions contribute to these hindrances:

"The geographic characteristics of certain areas create substantial challenges for us who wish to participate. The difficulty of navigating through mountainous terrain and off-road areas, compounded by the lack of proper pathways, compounds the challenges that community members face" (FO1).

Embedded within this theme is a sub-theme that brings attention to the inaccessibility of certain locations:

"Specific villages, such as Kiwlegedara, are isolated due to our geographic characteristics." The presence of mountains, rivers, and challenging terrains makes it difficult to participate" (FO7).

It is a barrier for community members to reach these areas, thereby inhibiting their participation in development projects. The direct statements from people, as reported by FO 7, highlight the tangible challenges posed by geographical characteristics, impacting the feasibility of community members engaging in development projects in these specific locations.

4.2.6 Limited Infrastructure Availability

The central theme around the challenges arising from the inadequate availability of infrastructure leads to impacting community members' ability to participate in various activities, including community development projects:

"We face challenges posed by a lack of reliable public transportation options. The absence of suitable public transportation options contributes to challenges in traveling significant distances, particularly in rural settings" (Participant 3).

"We face the absence of a phone signal, which affects our communication and access to information. We cannot get information at the earliest. So, we missed some kind of community activities" (Participant 7).

The sub-theme highlights that these infrastructure deficiencies compound the difficulties community members face in participating actively in development initiatives. The direct statements from people emphasize how inadequacies in transportation options and the lack of communication systems contribute to the cumulative impact of poor infrastructure, exacerbating difficulties in their active participation in development initiatives.

4.3 Issues Encountered in Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation

Problems confronted while engaging in community projects are presented based on the data gathered from field officers and rural community members.

4.3.1 Inter - Generational Conflicts and Poor Teamwork

Mismatched ideas among the different community members in the rural area and the lack of team spirit in engaging in rural development project implementation have been identified as one such problem.

4.3.1.1 Prevailing Conflicts in The Community

The central theme centers on conflicts arising from differing ideas, perspectives, and skills among community members of varying age groups, impeding active participation in rural development projects:

"We face the emergence of conflicts due to differing perspectives between older and younger community members. The conflicts often discourage us younger members from participating actively" (FO14).

4.3.1.2 Poor Collaboration Among Community Members

The major problem that prevents community involvement in active rural development initiatives is the difficulties brought on by poor collaboration. The core subject emphasizes the difficulties that arise as a result of poor collaboration, which impedes successful community engagement in rural development programs:

"We face difficulties in planning events and promoting harmony among neighbors. Some work hard and some do not contribute much. Officers also do not force them to engage in work. Some only participate if they are getting some benefits. And others try to attack the community and officers. So, all are not working as a team" (Participant 8).

The phrase highlights how community members may find it difficult to work together to accomplish project objectives without great collaboration, perhaps leading to dispersed efforts. Participant 08 emphasizes the challenges arising from a lack of harmony within the group, indicating that this difficulty in collaboration may hinder the collective efforts of community members to achieve project objectives.

4.3.2 Insufficient Monitoring by Field Officers

The core subject emphasizes difficulties caused by a lack of effective monitoring by field officers, which contributes to discouraging community members from participating in developmental project implementation:

"We face difficulty caused by insufficient supervision by field officers. People who know everything about projects. Due to lack of supervision, some community members are trying to do what they want in the field. It can lead to project failure" (Participant 6).

"We believe adequate supervision by field officers is critical for resolving disagreements and developing teamwork" (Participant 14).

The phrase highlights that the lack of adequate monitoring may impede the timely resolution of community problems. Participant 14 emphasize the importance of sufficient supervision by field officers, indicating that it is crucial for resolving disagreements and fostering teamwork within the community. The sub-theme underscores that the absence of such supervision may impede the timely resolution of community problems.

4.3.3 Lack of Financial Transparency

The central focus covers issues related to financial transparency, which impedes community engagement in rural development programs:

"We face difficulties in acquiring precise financial information from officials. Without knowing where money goes, we can't contribute our participation in development matters. Officers argue or ignore us when we ask about financial matters in the field. Officers do not share the financial information with the community" (Participant 12).

Participant 12's perspective draws attention to the challenges community members face in obtaining accurate financial information from officials, indicating that a lack of clarity in financial communication may hinder effective interaction within the community. The sub-theme underscores the importance of transparent financial communication for facilitating effective engagement among community members.

4.3.4 Poor Officer-Community Relationship

The central subject covers the issues that arise as a result of insufficient communication between officers and community participants, and feelings of disconnection among the community members which impede community participation in rural development initiatives.

4.3.4.1 Lack of Communication

Participants emphasized that challenges stemming from a lack of communication between law enforcement and the community, indicating that a lack of meaningful engagement may lead to difficulties in successful interaction between the two:

"We believe that the problems are caused by a lack of communication between officers and community people. Officers do not provide information about ongoing projects, and they do not pass messages in time. They act rudely in community projects. So, people are not happy to engage with work" (Participant 4).

4.3.4.2 Feeling of Disconnection

The community participants expressed their feelings of disconnection with the officers who made them stay away from participating in rural development project implementation. It made it very difficult for them to engage successfully with the project if they did not have a solid connection.

4.4 Suggestions to Increase Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation

This section provides ways to improve community participation in Rural Development Project Implementation.

4.4.1 Introduction of a Daily Wage System

The key subject emphasizes the importance of instituting a daily pay system to attract community engagement in rural development initiatives. This subject expresses the concept that people are eager to participate in these projects but need a way to reconcile their engagement with their everyday lives:

"We emphasize the community members' desire to engage in events. However, the difficulty is sacrificing daily revenue owing to project involvement. So, it is feasible to pay a daily wage to people who contribute to the community projects" (FO 1).

"Compensating members of the community for their involvement in development activities is a must. We believe that providing daily pay might increase individuals' commitment to community development efforts" (Participant 3).

It highlights that introducing a daily wage system could alleviate financial burdens, making project involvement more feasible for community members. The direct statements from field officers underscore the willingness of individuals to participate in community initiatives despite facing financial constraints. It suggests that implementing a daily wage system could be a potential solution to alleviate financial burdens, making project involvement more feasible for community members and encouraging their active participation.

4.4.2 Strengthening Telecommunication Infrastructure

The key subject emphasizes the importance of improving communication infrastructure, particularly mobile signal coverage, to build efficient communication channels for message transmission. This subject emphasizes the need to break down communication obstacles to improve participation in rural development programs:

"This issue is caused by insufficient cell signal coverage. It is critical to address poor signal strength as a communication obstacle that needs to be improved, and we require updated information " (Participant 3).

The theme highlights the need to remove communication barriers to provide effective communication for project-related concerns. Participant 3's perspective draws attention to the challenges arising from insufficient cell signal coverage, indicating that these issues impact effective communication for project-related concerns. The theme underscores the importance of addressing communication barriers to enhance effective communication and facilitate the discussion of project-related matters within the community.

4.4.3 Need Analysis for Project Implementation

The key topic emphasizes the need to complete rigorous need analysis testing before executing initiatives. This topic emphasizes the need to tailor programs to the unique requirements of the community and prioritize their well-being:

"It is critical to evaluate project relevance and ensure that efforts meet actual community needs. It facilitates the development of useful projects for the community who motivates to finish the projects with their collaboration if a particular project caters their needs" (FO 1).

"A need analysis enhances project results and can pinpoint critical areas that need to be intervened in, leading to more effective and results-driven initiatives" (FO 11).

This perspective underscores the significance of requirement analysis to improve project outcomes. The sub-theme highlights how to conduct a need analysis that can identify critical areas for intervention, ultimately leading to more effective and results-driven initiatives within the community. The importance of a people-centered approach in project planning is emphasized by another sub-theme which emphasizes that creating initiatives that genuinely benefit the community begins with a comprehensive need analysis.

4.4.4 People - Centric Project Design

It is important to promote projects that are in line with the wants and requirements of the neighborhood. The research emphasizes the necessity of project design that gives local expertise, culture, and goals priority:

"The attention to the range of initiatives that may be in line with community needs, including water projects, attempts to build schools, early childhood development centers, and road upgrades" (FO 4).

The above discussion highlights the community-relevant projects. The sub-theme highlights the crucial nature of giving priority to projects that are relevant and responsive to the specific needs of the community.

4.4.5 Transparency in Financial Matters and Build Trust Among Community Members

It emphasizes the importance of transparent and open communication regarding the financial aspects of development initiatives to promote trust among community members:

"Transparency in financial transactions is necessary to lay the groundwork for trust and confidence. Without knowing where the money goes, we cannot contribute our participation in development matters. Correct information about funds of projects will motivate the community and it builds the trust between officers and the community" (Participants 3).

The emphasis of the sub-theme is on the value of transparency in promoting responsibility and trust. It underscores the necessity of transparent communication regarding financial concerns to foster confidence. The sub-theme highlights the importance of open financial communication as a means to build trust and confidence among community members. Financial transparency builds trust and will result the improved officer–community relationship.

4.4.6 Conducting Community Awareness, Capacity Building and Leadership Development Training for Field Officers

The overarching topic emphasizes the significance of conducting awareness and leadership programs to educate both villagers and the officers about rural development. This subject emphasizes the need to improve their awareness and competence in many parts of rural development programs:

"Leadership programs can empower community people and enable them to contribute successfully to rural development initiatives" (FO 6).

"There is a need to build capacity of officers via awareness and education initiatives. It needs to motivation, knowledge, attitudes, and skills of officers that support the implementation of rural development projects" (FO 11).

Further investigation reveals the necessity of improving knowledge and abilities and that emphasizes the possibility of greater awareness to provide officials with the skills and information required for effective rural development efforts. It also, highlights the necessity of building capacity through awareness and education initiatives, suggesting that these efforts can equip officials with the skills and information needed for successful rural development endeavors. It is also important to initiate knowledge enhancement programs promoting effective community engagement.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Reasons for Lower Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation

The findings of the study suggest that there are several reasons why community participation in rural development projects is low in the Kandakatiya DSD. One of the major reasons is the lack of formal education among villagers, as most of them have not received further education after GCE (Ordinary Level) or primary education. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research conducted on community participation in rural development projects. A lack of knowledge and awareness among the community members was a significant barrier to community participation in development projects in rural Bangladesh. (Akter et al.,2019; Atapattu & Wijesinghe, 2018).

Traditional mindsets can be resistant to change or being distrustful of external interventions, making it challenging to mobilize community members for active participation. The community may lack a sense of ownership and responsibility towards these projects, as they perceive that officers are solely responsible and being paid for the development activities (Kamau, Kariuki & Gichohi, 2019). Negative attitudes towards community members, attitude problems, and negative thoughts about their capabilities can result in reduced community participation (Sharif, 2015).

Administration and management issues of government institutes are also considered significant factors for lower community participation in rural development projects by both the community and officers. Lack of trust in government officers and government projects, coupled with poor time management by the government, may further impact community participation (Paul, 1987). This inconsistency causes frustration among community members and diminishes their trust in government officials and development projects. Community members' day-to-day work and livelihood activities may leave them with limited time to actively participate in the projects (Cohen & Uphoff 1980).

Moreover, officers may encounter difficulties in communication and engagement with communities in remote and geographically isolated areas (Sharif, 2015). Atapattu & Wijesinghe (2018) identified geographical barriers and conflicts among community members as factors that hindered community participation in development projects in Sri Lanka.

Shafique (2022) and Elahi et al. (2016) found that communication is a critical factor that influences community participation in rural development projects. Poor communication infrastructure, including weak signal strengths in rural areas, can hinder officers' communication with the community (McBride, 2007). Therefore, it is important to improve communication channels to enhance community participation in rural development projects.

5.2 Issues Encountered in Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation

The findings revealed several factors that contribute to the issues in community participation. When teamwork is poor, there may be a limited ability to address complex challenges and find innovative solutions, which can discourage participation and engagement in project activities. It can have a demotivating effect on community members, leading to decreased enthusiasm for participating in development projects. Poor teamwork can result in fragmented communication, leading to misunderstandings, misalignment of objectives, and a lack of clarity about project activities. This can deter community members from actively participating in rural development projects.

Another significant factor contributing to the issues in community participation is the lack of a strong relationship between officers and participants. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Khan and Qureshi (2016) which states that the relationship between officers and participants is a significant factor that influences community participation in rural development projects. Therefore, it is important to strengthen relationships between officers and participants to enhance community participation in rural development projects.

Effective monitoring by field officers positively influences community participation in rural development projects (Sulemana & Amakye, 2019). Community members may feel that officers are not effectively monitoring project activities or maintaining a positive relationship with them, which can lead to reduced motivation and engagement (Golay, 2022).

Furthermore, a lack of transparency in financial matters, such as unclear financial reporting or mismanagement of funds, can erode community trust and negatively impact their willingness to participate (Bertolini et al., 2008).

5.3 Suggestions to Increase Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation

Both the community and officers also emphasize the importance of the introduction of a daily wage system as a potential solution to promote community participation in rural development projects. Kritzinger-Van Niekerk & Govender (2015) also confirmed that a daily wage system can help to encourage community members to participate in project activities and promote ownership of the project.

Enhancing communication facilities was another strategy identified in the findings. According to Kim and Lee (2014), effective communication is essential for building trust between community members and project officials, which is crucial for successful project implementation.

One potential strategy identified was conducting need analysis tests before implementing projects which was also suggested by field officers. This can help to identify community needs, priorities, and preferences, which can inform the design and implementation of projects (Uwizeyimana & Kim, 2020). This suggests a shared understanding that community-centered project design can enhance community engagement and ownership.

According to Khan & Qureshi (2016), transparency is essential for building trust and accountability between community members and project officials. Involving community members in the decision-making process and being receptive to their feedback and concerns can also help rebuild trust.

Finally, developing interpersonal skills of officers who directly work with people was suggested in the findings. According to Sharif (2015), interpersonal skills, such as communication, active listening, and empathy, are crucial for effective community engagement and project implementation.

However, findings emphasize that top management of government or any entity engaging in the planning of rural development projects should thoroughly focus on the timely implementation of projects, and proper funding to build trust among the community. Introducing community-friendly projects using need analysis and valuing community ideas also has a massive impact on increasing community participation in rural development projects.

Theories of the rural development project implementation also explain the objectives which are made before. Actor Network Theory (ANT) focuses on the relationships and interactions between various actors, both human and non-human, within a network. In the context of lower community participation in rural development projects, ANT can help identify the key actors involved, such as government agencies, NGOs, local communities, and resources, and analyze how their interactions influence community involvement (Latour, 2005).

Stakeholder Theory also emphasizes the importance of engaging and managing stakeholders effectively in project implementation. It recognizes that stakeholders, including local communities, have a vested interest in the outcomes of development projects and should be actively involved in decision-making processes (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

By combining Actor-Network Theory and Stakeholder Theory, stakeholders can gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex network of relationships that impact community participation in rural development projects. This integrated approach can help identify barriers to participation, such as power dynamics, conflicting interests, and communication challenges, and develop strategies to address them.

Overall, the relevance of Actor-Network Theory and Stakeholder Theory for lower community participation in rural development project implementation lies in their ability to provide a holistic perspective on the relationships, interactions, and interests at play, and to inform more effective and inclusive approaches to community engagement.

6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study revealed the reasons for lower community participation in rural development project implementation at the Kandaketiya DSD, issues encountered in community participation in rural development projects, and suggested policy measures for increasing community participation in rural development project implementation. The findings highlight the implications for national-level project planners, field officers, and community members as how to obtain effective participation from the community for rural development project implementation at the divisional level.

Policy initiatives should be focused on making awareness and capacity-building among rural communities to effectively engage in development projects. This may involve providing adequate information, technical assistance, and resources that can empower community members to take on active roles in project implementation.

Policy interventions should aim to facilitate collaboration and networking among community-based organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders involved in rural development to address the challenges of lower community participation and encourage collective action in development projects.

Fostering inclusive and participatory processes will help overcome barriers to teamwork and encourage greater participation from all community members. Policies should incorporate robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of community participation on rural development projects. Since the ultimate beneficiaries of rural development projects are the community, their participation in such project implementation is crucial.

7. Limitations and Further Research

This research is based on qualitative research method using a smaller sample with reference to a selected divisional area.

Further research could be conducted using a larger sample covering other areas of the country. Research could be conducted using quantitative research methods to validate the research findings of this study.

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Impact of Training and Development on Employee Performance: With reference to a Selected Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka

S. A. S. Dismi Jayasuriya
Sri Lanka Administrative Service
dismijayasuriya@gmail.com

Abstract

Training and development are important aspects of human resource management for improving employee performance while upgrading the quality and the quantity of the work. There is criticism of the general public towards some of the Divisional Secretariats' inefficiency in executing public delivery services in Sri Lanka. One of the main reasons for this inefficiency is the inability to succeed in their jobs. The objective of the study is to identify the impact of training and development on employee performance in a selected Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka. The study is based on quantitative research methods. The population for the study consists of two hundred and eighty-seven employees. A hundred employees were selected using stratified random sampling method. The data is collected using a structured questionnaire and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that there is a positive impact of the training and development on employees' performance. It is important to pay more attention to training content, and training outcome. As there is a dearth of research on training and development and employee performance of the Divisional Secretariats in Sri Lanka, findings of this study can be used to improve employee performance through effective training and development of the selected Divisional Secretariat specifically, and all Divisional Secretariat in generally in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Divisional Secretariat, Employee Performance, Training and Development, Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

The Divisional Secretariat (DS) functions as a subunit of the Ministry of Home Affairs. DS collaborates with government and non-government organizations in the process of implementing public policies, projects and programs at grass root level. The DS provides a broad range of services required for the general public from their birth to death. Training and Development focuses on gaining or transmitting knowledge, skills and capabilities required to meet their current and future challenges (Niazi, 2011). This study is based on the Hataraliyadda DS which is situated in the Kandy district and its boundary in Thumpane, in the East Harispaththuwa, in the south Yatinuwara and in the west is the Rambukkana DS area. The DS has administrative subunits responsible for civil administration at grass root level and provides a broader range of public services in the area (State Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024).

The DS plays an important role in social and economic development in the respective area according to the national priorities of the government. It functions as the center for civil administration and carries out administrative obligations in the respective division. Further, it collaborates with different stakeholders including government and non-government in the process of implementing public policies, projects and programs in the village level. The DS provides different services related to poverty alleviation, economic and social empowerment, and government land management, registration of birth, marriage and death and personal registration as the key functions (Divisional Secretariat Colombo, 2024).

The three hundred and twenty-four officers attached to the selected DS to provide public services for a broad range of stakeholders. The major criticism of the general public towards the Divisional Secretariats in general regarding inefficiency in executing services is due to the lack of competencies, work delays, repetitions, negligence and customer care issues. Therefore, it is important to undertake research to identify training needs, requirements for redesigning of training and the areas to be more concerned on future training process in the selected DS. Although, the public service relies on its officers' expertise to deliver its services to the public in an efficient manner, the majority of the public officers do not possess necessary competencies to perform their duties to the required standards (Administration, 2013).

Training and Development are considered as important factors of Human Resources Management in the event of improving employees' performance. The basic objective of training is to upgrade knowledge, ability, attitude and skills. The training contributes to maximize the utilization of human resources towards the accomplishment of organizational goals (Mishra, 2020).

The Government has spent 577,4252 million Sri Lankan Rupees in 2021, 498, 0000 million Sri Lankan Rupees in 2022 and 716,6301 million Sri Lankan Rupees in 2023 from the government budget (Finance, 2023) for training and development of the public sector employees. However, there is a lack of research examining the impact of training and development on the employees' performance. The study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What are the training and development dimensions that impact on employees' performance?
2. What is the impact of training and development dimensions on employees' performance?

The dimensions of training and development identified through a survey of literature are design, content, application and outcome.

The study of the impact of training and development on the employees' performance will evaluate the current position of training and development programs and identify the negative or the positive impact of training and development on the employees' performance. Divisional Secretariats established in Sri Lanka are providing equal services to the general public along with the same cadre of employees; therefore, the findings of the research study will be important to develop training and development functions of the selected DS in Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

Human Resource Management plays a major role in achieving organizational goals. Training and development are one of the most vital functions of Human Resource Management to improve performance of the employee at individual, collegial and organizational level (Salah, 2016).

2.1 Evolution of the Training and Development

Training and development are nothing new to the twenty-first century but has rather evolved since the earliest stages of human civilization and has been gradually refined into the sophisticated process (A Historical Background on Training and Development, 2013).

Education is the origin of training and development. It indicates a series of human development from existence - driven learning to education in the ancient time. World War II contributed to emerge the leadership development programs and the training for teams and later focused on the development of individuals, organizations, and communities for a variety of work-related purposes (Torraco, 2016).

Principles of scientific management, world wars and the establishment of training departments in companies led to the evolution of on-the-job training for employees. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory regarding a correlation between employee motivation and employee productivity is an impact as the requirement for intrinsic satisfaction. The Digital Transformation changes the technology and introduces Artificial Intelligence for personalized training programs (Alias et al., 2019).

Technological advancements permit training to take place virtually at any time anywhere. The transformation has been accompanied by a growing and regularly developing body of research across a variety of disciplines that have improved the way of designing and delivering the training and development programs in the organizations (Bell et al., 2017).

Training and Development is a function of Human Resource Management that focuses on gaining or transmitting knowledge, skills and capabilities required to execute a specific activity of the organization. It is important for both organization and individual to meet their current and future challenges. It is a combination of a broader range of learning activities of the individual for their present duties that improve organizational efficiency and public service aiming on the career advancements and the enhancement of the individual, the team and the institutional efficiency (Niazi, 2011).

2.2 Training and Development Process

ADDIE model is a framework for instructional design and training development that guides trainers through a systematic process to create effective, efficient training experiences that fulfill the training requirements. The ADDIE model is categorized into five actionable stages: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation (James, 2024).

2.3 Training and Development Methods

The training method is a set of systematic procedures, activities, or techniques designed to deliver knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes to the participants who have direct efficacy in enhancing the job performance (Martin et al., 2014). The below table summarizes various methods of training and development.

Table 01: Training and Development Methods

Method	Description
Job Rotation	Ensures higher interest, improves commitment and provides opportunities for development, promotions, improves career satisfaction, motivation and collaboration of the employees.
Job Shadowing	Generates employee interest, commitment and new perception. It is suitable for present employees giving an opportunity to perform in a new role.
Lecture	Suitable for a large audience, a short period to design, easy revision of the content and training needs. The method is fixed, inactive and separate from the actual practice.
Case Study	Enhances trainee interest and positively effect on the motivation of the trainee. It is important to develop decision - making skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills and analytical skills.
Games - Based Training	Method is low cost and competitive. It motivates the majority of trainees. The content of the training is also applicable to the job.
Internship	Less or no cost and provides the chance to work in the role that the trainee expects to perform.
Mentoring & Apprenticeship	The method assists the trainee in two main ways providing psychosocial supports and career facilitation.
Programmed Instruction	The constant delivery of the techniques standardizes the training practice, and the capacity to provide multisensory features.
Role Modeling	The participants are provided the opportunity to watch a demonstration and to practice on a real-life model.
Role Play	It is providing the opportunity to practice and reflect on the way of managing significant responsibilities of the employment.
Team Training	Develop social skills and friendship in a team. It is applicable for the situations that employees work as teams in the organization.

Source: Based on Martin et al. (2014)

2.4 Training and Development Models

Different types of training models that can be applied based on a particular need of the organization. It is required to identify the objectives of the training to decide the best lead towards the goal. It should be selected based on audience size, training objectives, availability of resources, training needs and outcomes (Harappa, 2021).

Table 02: Training and Development Models

Method	Description
ADDIE Model	The model stands for Analyze, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. The learning needs, skills and knowledge of the trainees are analyzed to recognize the objectives and goals of the training program using surveys, courses or activities in order to design and develop the training and evaluate the progress of the training.
BLOOM'S Taxonomy	The six steps in the model are remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create. Each step is related to different nomenclature as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
MERRILL'S Principles of Instruction	The activation is to accelerate knowledge using training material to build one's own experience. The demonstration needs multiple formats to share information. The application emphasizes the importance of the utilization of training outcomes into work. The knowledge and information retain for longer and lead to self-sufficiency. The final step is integration that leads to fulfill the training objectives
GAGNE'S Nine Events of Instructions	The model initiates with gaining attention and inform, the training objectives as a second step. The third step is to give access to simplified training materials and guidance. The trainees will internalize new knowledge by engaging in activities and participation. The model is giving feedback to ensure that, the trainees go through the right path. The outcomes are evaluated and assessed to confirm the achievement in the final step of the nine events.
KEMP Design Model	The nine elements are built by identifying training goals, understanding audience, identifying specific needs and alignment of the task with the relevant course materials. The content is structured to match with the objectives. The trainees are motivated to engage in the material for comprehension. The delivery mode is determined considering the responses. The evaluation benefits to determine training progress, assess the obstacles and assist to achieve the goals.
The Kirkpatrick Training Model	The model is used for the evaluation of the results of the training. The trainer acquires the feedback. It has four levels namely reaction, learning, behavior and results. The first step is to identify the reactions of the trainees. The second step is to realize the extent of learning that has taken place as a result of the training material considering the impact towards skill development. The third step is behavior or application of real-life situations. The final step determines the achievement of the training objectives.

Source: Harappa (2021)

2.5 Training Design

The training design is the degree to which training has been designed and delivered to give employees the ability to transfer learning to the job. It involves planning and determining the suitable activities, the selection of appropriate methods and determining the sources for the purpose of achieving certain objectives that represent the expectations of trainees to be mastered and requirements to be achieved by the trainees at the end of the training programme (Alias et al., 2019). The training is conducted to achieve desired results from the employees. The well-designed or carefully delivered training courses represent the expectation level of the employees (Kashif et al., 2020).

2.6 Training Content

The content development is the process of designing, developing, managing and maintaining the programs. The organizations revealed that, the content development is the second most critical process of the training in order to become successful. The great training content conveys the knowledge and skills that employees need to succeed in the job roles within the organization. The content creating is critical in achieving consistent high performance of the organization (Training Industry, 2022). The training contents match with the training needs and objectives. It indicates the things to be educated, at which level and in what amounts. It is developed based on job requirements, skills and knowledge applying to the job (Alias et al., 2019).

2.7 Training Application

The process of learning about the job at training and applying or transferring that knowledge into real life work situations. It includes three stages in the learning transfer process as preparation, action and evaluation. The poor knowledge transfer destructs the productivity and the employee morale. The success of the training program depends on the ability to facilitate for learning transferring process. The employees often struggle in effectively transferring learning into real life job situations. The managers need to assist employees to fix the problems and point out the proper procedures (Dublino, 2022).

2.8 Training Outcomes

The training and development lead to improve the overall performance of the employees to accomplish present jobs effectively and develops the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the employees necessary for the future ensuring higher organizational performance. The training is important for the employee and the organization that positively influence on employees' performance in developing employee knowledge, skills, ability, competencies and behavior and facilitate to identify the low performing workers and the competency development needs to be shaped according to the

organizational needs to ensure efficiency in duties, achievement of the objectives and reduce dissatisfaction, complaints, absenteeism and turnover (Nassazi, 2013). The training and development of many organizations leads to transforming mission and vision into reality. The capability is increased due to improvement of various existing skills and new skills that help the completion of the tasks of the jobs. It has created a relationship between employee performance and skill improvement (Imran & Tanveer, 2015).

2.9 Employee Performance

The employees' performance refers to how workers behave in the workplace and how well they perform the duties of the job. The performance of employees consists of factors such as quality, quantity, effectiveness and behaviors of employees. The poor performance of employees provides negative impacts on reputation, customer satisfaction and revenue. It needs to monitor the quality of work and the individual goals of the employee. The effectiveness of the training prevents mistakes, achieves deadlines and reduces time wastages, materials and efforts (Donohoe, 2019). The learning organizations play a vital role in enhancing the employees' performance through trainings and development. The performance depends on the internal satisfaction towards the occupation. The employees who are satisfied about the jobs and the organization are obviously willing to perform better to ensure organizational goal achievement (Dahkoul, 2018).

2.10 Employee Performance Evaluation

The multiple performance evaluation methods are better to have a clearer picture of individual, team and organizational performance. The employee performance improvement plan is required to respond to the findings of employee performance evaluation and useful to identify reasons for not achieving employee performance expectations due to the lack of proper training, motivation, morale or performance targets (Donohoe, 2019). The selecting of the evaluation method for evaluation of employee performance depends on the reaction of the organization to the evaluation and expected accomplishment of the evaluation process (Amisano, 2017). The training and development leads to important benefits for individuals and organizations. Training and development have positive effects on Organizational Performance and productivity (Rani, 2023).

Table 03: Employee Performance and Evaluation Methods

Evaluation Method	Description
Manager Evaluation	The manager provides performance ratings of the employee or group based on the series of criteria.
360 Feedback	Multi-source feedback on teams to accomplish an evaluation as peers, supervisors, and colleagues.
Objective Performance	The goals of individual employees are measured to identify whether they fail to achieve, accomplish or exceed the expected goal.
Team Evaluation	The group members are evaluated each team member and also the group as a whole based on both general criteria and specific criteria.

Source: Based on Amisano (2017)

2.11 Impact of Training and Development on Employee Performance

It is difficult to decide the financial return of the training. Evaluation of the training is conducted to identify not only the financial benefits, but also the benefits in terms of people, work, and power. A comprehensive assessment of training outcomes measures the reactions of trainees, the impact on the workplace, operation and financial outcomes and inspiration in supporting employees to do changes (Bell et al., 2017).

There is a positive relationship between training and development and employees' performance and productivity across the private banking sector in Bangladesh and the study has strongly agreed that the various training methods are beneficial to the organization. The return on investment on training and development receives as long-term increase in productivity and quality. Individual assessments identify the improvement needs of the employees and also on the job training is very effective as it saves time and expenses (Jeni et al., 2021).

The feedback after training identifies the importance areas of improving employees' performance. The training and development provide opportunities for employees to have a better career life and opportunities in the organization and it is an important function for organizations to have skill and capable employees to assure better performance (Karim et.al., 2019).

The training and development have a positive impact on the employees to work more effectively as it increases interpersonal and technical abilities, teamwork, job confidence and motivation. The organizations need to invest continuously for the enhancement of knowledge, skill and attitude to improve employees' performance and productivity. The organizations spend massive amounts of money and time on training in order to develop job-related competencies to learn faster and to adapt changes. The training and development improve the initiative of the employee and the quality of work to be more committed to achieve goals and objectives of the organization. The training impacts on employees' productivity, improves the success of the organizations that leads to the prosperity of countries by designing and delivering training and development for the workforce at national level (Nda & Fard, 2013). According to the literature review, training and development have direct impact on employees' performance.

AMO model explains the relationship between HR practices and performance by analyzing HR approaches. Organizational leaders can use this model to influence employees' performances. Institutions can optimize the three elements to enhance employees' performance and achieve their objectives. HR professionals can use an individual's ability (A), motivation (M) and opportunity (O) to measure their performance (P). We can represent this information with the equation; $P = AMO$ (Team, 2022).

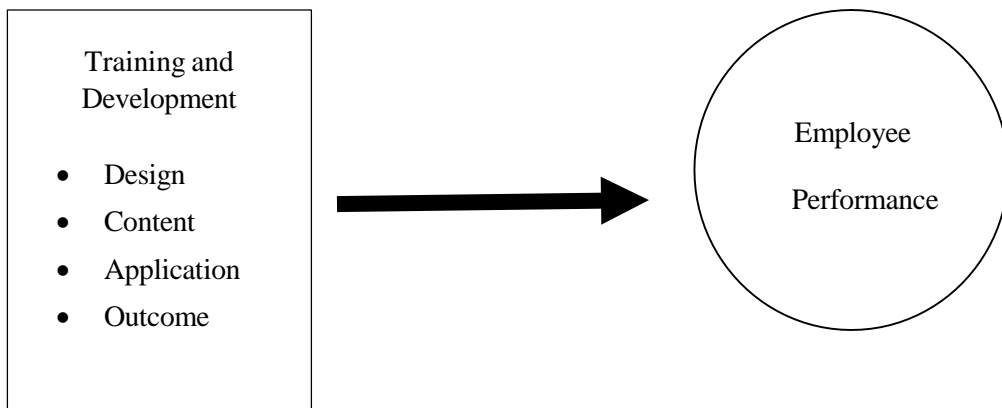
3. Methodology

The study used quantitative research methods along with the deductive approach. Based on the literature review the following figure is presented the conceptual framework of the study.

3.1 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is constructed subject to the literature review of the existing studies and the theories related to the topic.

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework



Source: Based on Literature Review

3.2 Hypothesis Development

The training and development is the independent variable and employee performance is the dependent variable of the study. The training is conducted to achieve desired results from the employees. The well-designed or carefully delivered trainings represent the expectation level of the employees (Kashif et.al,2020). The content created is critical in achieving consistent high performance of the organization (Training Industry, 2022). The success of the training program depends on the ability to facilitate for learning transfer process. The employees often struggle to effectively transferring learning into real life job situations. The managers need to assist employees to fix the problems and point out the proper procedures (Dublino, 2022). The capability is increased due to improvement of various existing skills and new skills that help for the completion of the tasks of the jobs. It has created a relationship between employee performance and skill improvement (Imran & Tanveer, 2015). The employees who satisfied about the jobs and the organization are obviously willing to perform better to ensure organizational goal achievement (Dahkoul, 2018).

The hypotheses are constructed through the conceptual framework based on the assumptions to be tested in the study as follows:

The main hypothesis:

- 3.2.1 There is a significant impact on training and development on employees' performance.

The sub-hypotheses:

- H1: There is a significant impact of the training design on employees' performance
- H2: There is a significant impact of the training content on employees' performance.
- H3: There is a significant impact of the training application on employees' performance.
- H4: There is a significant impact of the training outcome and the employees' performance.

Table 04: Measurements of the Variables

Variable	Dimensions	Criteria
Training and Development	Design	Suitability of method Different method Reasonable time Training Requirements Equal opportunities
	Content	Relevancy to post Update with new knowledge Important topic
	Application	Ability to apply for job Freedom for innovation Reward for better application
	Outcome	Improvement of knowledge Improvement of skills Application of skills to job Reduce unnecessary usage of resources Increase voluntary participation Improve work capacity
	Performance	Goal achievement Quality improvement Quantity Improvement Employee satisfaction Employee improvement

Source: Based on Literature Review

3.3 Population and Sample

The total population of the research is derived from all the employees working in the Divisional Secretariat. The total number of the existing employees is two hundred and eighty-seven (287). The training and development programs are conducted for the Management Service Officers, Development Officers, Grama Niladri (Officers) and Samurdhi Officers by the Divisional Secretariat. The study is focused on the

training programs conducted during five years from 2017 to 2021 by the selected Divisional Secretariat.

The following table depicts the subcategory of the population represented in the study. The proportionate stratified sampling method is used to identify the sample size of each stratum proportionately to the population size (Hayes, 2022). The population is stratified based on the level of the employees. The sample size is determined as 100. From each stratum samples are selected based on proportionate random sampling method.

Table 05: Sample Size

Designation	Population	Sample
Grama Niladari (Officer)	57	20
Management Service Officer	25	09
Development Officer	118	41
Samurdhi Development Officer	87	30
Total	287	100

Source: Field Data (2022)

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

This research is based on quantitative research methods. Primary data is collected using a structured questionnaire which comprises two parts. Part A contains demographic information about the respondents and Part B is developed to obtain answers to test the research objectives. The questionnaire has been translated to Sinhala medium considering the language barriers and given as hard copies due to the lack of IT competency. The secondary data is collected through the research studies, the research articles and the websites related to the subject area. A pilot survey has been conducted before sending the questionnaire to the sample.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software package. The hypotheses were tested using the Linear Regression and Pearson Correlation. The data is presented using graphs, charts, tables and paragraphs.

4.1 Analysis of Demographic Data

According to the demographic analysis, 78% of the sample were females, while 42% of those were within the age group of 36-45 years. About 41%, comes from development officers and 47% have 6 to 15 years of experience. Nearly, 72% are field officers.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

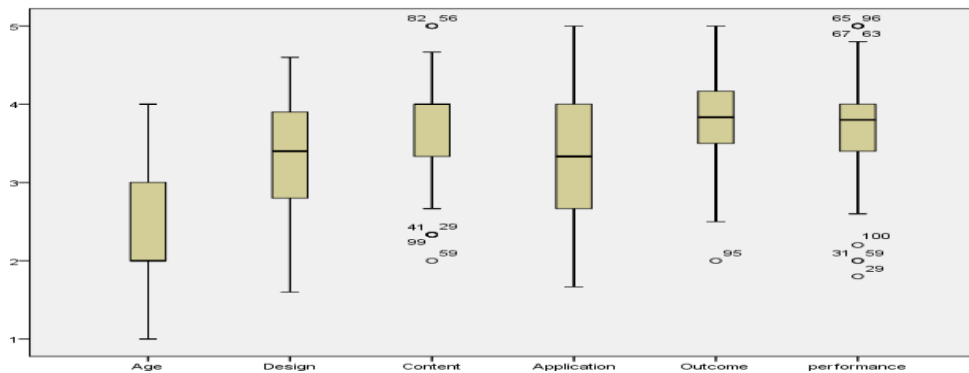
The internal consistency of the data is ensured using the reliability test of Cronbach Alpha after confirming the accuracy of the data.

The value of Cronbach Alpha is 0.895 that is calculated using all the questions in the Likert scale. Therefore, the internal consistency of the data is good according to the reliability test. The reliability of the five variables is above 0.7 (Frost, 2024) that indicates a high internal consistency of the data of the study.

4.3 Extra Ordinary Items Analysis

The outliers of the data are tested using Boxplot (Box Whisker Diagram) with the use of the mean value of the variables. The extreme outliers are not indicated in the graph. Therefore, no data are identified within the outer fence.

Figure 02: The Outlier Analysis



Source: Survey Results (2022)

4.4 Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

The descriptive analysis examines the normality of the data using the variables. The mean examines the central tendency. The Standard Deviation evaluates the dispersion of the data. The Skewness and Kurtosis indicate the distribution of the data.

Table 06: Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Statistics		Design	Content	Application	Outcome	Performance
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.3220	3.6500	3.3600	3.7933	3.7400
Std. Deviation		.67623	.64680	.84045	.56958	.63786
Skewness		-.334	-.470	-.188	-.595	-.533

Std. Error of Skewness	.241	.241	.241	.241	.241
Kurtosis	-.767	-.122	-.712	.444	.967
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.478	.478	.478	.478	.478

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The mean value of the content, the application, the outcome and the performance are close to the value of 3.5 that indicates the agree level responses. The mean value of the design is close to 3.0 indicating the neutral level. The high value of deviation displays the training application, and the minimum deviation shows the training outcome variable according to the standard deviation. The Skewness of all variables is within the normal range in between -1 and 0.5. Therefore, the variables are approximately normal. All the values of standard error of the Skewness of the analysis are below 0.723. The data can be considered as normal. The values for the Kurtosis are below 1.434. Therefore, the data is normal according to the mean value, the standard deviation, the Skewness, the standard error of the Skewness and kurtosis of the analysis.

4.5 Pearson Correlation Analysis

The Pearson Correlation Analysis is conducted to examine the relationship between two variables before testing the hypothesis of the research. The relationship among employee performance and other independent variables of the design, the content, application and outcome are examined using the Pearson correlation.

4.5.1 Training Design

Table 07: Training Design and Performance - Correlations Analysis

Correlations		Performance	Design
Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.298**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N	100	100
Design	Pearson Correlation	.298**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	100	100

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The P Value is 0.003 and Pearson Correlation is 0.298. There is a significant positive relationship between training design and employee performance.

4.5.2 Training Content

Table 08: Training Content and Performance - Correlation Analysis

Correlations			
Performance	Pearson	Performance	Content
	Correlation	1	.543**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Content	Pearson	.543**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The P Value is 0.000 and Pearson Correlation is 0.543. There is a significant positive relationship between training content and employee performance.

4.5.3 Training Application

Table 09: Application and Performance - Correlation Analysis

Correlations			
Performance	Pearson	Performance	Application
	Correlation	1	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Application	Pearson	.459**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The P Value is 0.000 and Pearson Correlation is 0.459 There is a significant positive relationship between training application and employee performance.

4.5.4 Training Outcome

Table 10: The Training Outcome and Performance - Correlation Analysis

Correlations		Performance	Outcome
Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.593**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Outcome	Pearson Correlation	.593**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The P Value is 0.000 and Pearson Correlation is 0.593. There is a significant positive relationship between training outcome and employee performance.

The correlation analysis indicated that there are significant relationships among the training content, the training design, the training application and the training outcome and the employee performance.

4.6 Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis is conducted to examine the impact of the training and development on the employees' performance by examining alternative hypothesis.

Table 11: ANOVA Table

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.023	4	4.506	19.232	.000 ^b
	Residual	22.257	95	.234		
	Total	40.280	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Outcome, Design, Content, Application

Source: Survey Results (2022)

As value of the ANOVA is 0.000, the model is highly significant.

4.7 Model Summary

Table 12: Model Summary

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.669 ^a	.447	.424	.48403	1.880

a. Predictors: (Constant), Outcome, Design, Content, Application

b. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The R value is 0. 669 indicating the design, the content, the application, the outcome and the employee performance are significantly correlated. The R-Square Value is .447 that is more than 0.2 and appropriate for the analysis. The Adjusted R-Square Value is 0.424 that lower than the R-Square value indicating a small deviation assuring the validity of the model. The Durbin Waston examines the independence of residuals. The value for the residuals is 1.880 within the range in between 1.5 to 2.5 that indicates the suitability of the model.

Table 13: Coefficient Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.635	.381		1.667	.099		
Training	.006	.084	.006	.068	.946	.727	1.375
Design							
Content	.335	.097	.340	3.454	.001	.602	1.661
Application	.009	.084	.012	.111	.912	.478	2.091
Outcome	.483	.105	.431	4.583	.000	.657	1.522

a. Dependent Variable: performance

Source: Survey Results (2022)

The coefficient table indicates the effect of the independent variables towards the dependent variable. The effect is identified using the P value and the Beta value of the analysis. The standardized beta value of the training outcome and training content are 0.431 and 0.340 respectively. These two variables are the most influential factors for the employee performance. The standardized beta value of the training application and training design are 0.012 and 0.006 respectively. Both of the variables are less influential for the employee performance.

The Divisional Secretariat should pay more and the training content in the process of the training and development. The collinearity statistics measures the relationship of independent variables to examine the availability of similar variables in the model. The VIF values of the variables are below ten. Therefore, the multi collinearity is not affected and that ensures the suitability of the analysis. The tolerance values are more than 0.1 according to the analysis. Therefore, the model is appropriate for the analysis.

The accuracy and the reliability of the data are examined using the descriptive statistic and the reliability analysis respectively. The analyses focused on identifying the relationship among the sub variables of the training and development and the employee performance using the Coefficient Correlation analysis. The impact of training and development is examined with the use of the linear regression analysis.

5. Discussion

The relationship between training content and employee performance is positive and highly significant in this study and it agrees with the previous research findings. There is a positive and significant role of training content and learning style on employee performance (Bhatti et al., 2021).

The positive effect may not be produced easily by just incurring the finance for the training programs. The attention of the organization for giving the tools to the employees and spending more time to improve learning transfer process ensure more benefits with long term effect for the organization. (Dublino, 2022). The study also proves that there is a positive and highly significant impact on Training Outcome and the employees' performance.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Divisional Secretariat should be more concerned on identified training and development dimensions that have significant and positive relationship with employees' performance from most influential factor to the least influential factor such as training outcome and training content. The training outcome and training content have strong positive effect on employees' performance. Therefore, it is important to give priority for identifying training outcomes and training content in designing the training and development programs.

The training design and the application of knowledge and skills to work in the training and development process have no significant impact on employee performance in this study. Therefore, it needs to redesign the respective dimensions to ensure better

employee performance by training and development.

The study revealed that the training and development have significant impact on employee's performance. Therefore, the Divisional Secretariat should be highly concerned on training and development function in order to ensure efficient and effective public service delivery.

7. Limitations and Further Research

The unavailability of data of training and development of the Divisional Secretariat in the previous years due to data management issues negatively impacted the study. Also, some employees are not interested in providing data for the research study and the time period for data collection is limited. The data biasness could have occurred while the employees filled up the questionnaire, because they are attached to the Divisional Secretariat.

The study was conducted relating to one selected Divisional Secretariat considering four variables. Care must be taken to generalize the findings of the study for all the other Divisional Secretariats in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is expected to carry out future research using other Divisional Secretariat using more variables as an expansion for the study to provide better direction for the training and development procedures in the Divisional Secretariats in Sri Lanka.

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Buddhist Mindfulness Practices in Conflict Resolution

Rev. Bingiriye Sunandabodhi,
Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka
sunandaboodhi@gmail.com

Abstract

Conflict resolution management has become a prominent subject in the modern era, as conflicts can arise at various levels, from individuals to entire countries, involving issues of religion, race, and more. Currently, the world is grappling with two active wars, and these conflicts have a direct impact on the prosperity of nations, posing a threat to global sustainability. This study aims to find solutions for disputes through the spiritual teachings of the Buddha. This study is based on qualitative research using content analysis and reviewing various published and unpublished articles, journals, and digital and electronic sources including websites and social media. Buddhism addresses the root causes of conflicts, such as greed, hatred, and delusion. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is to eradicate these root causes. The foundational principles of Buddhism revolve around spreading peace, tolerance, and equity among all human beings worldwide. Buddha's teaching provides advice for resolving conflicts and wars. In essence, Buddhism promotes non-violence, encouraging individuals and societies to seek harmony and consensus through peaceful means. The overarching goal is the cessation of conflicts, fostering inner and outer peace, and contributing to the world's sustainability.

Keywords: Buddhism, Conflict Management, Peace

1. Introduction

The term conflict is derived from the Latin word "Confligave" which means fighting, warfare, incompatibility, and opposition (Simpson & Weine, 1989). Normally, Conflicts arise among people who have different beliefs, attitudes, customs, norms, and needs. Conflicts come to the surface in the form of disputes, quarrels, and sometimes even killing. In other words, conflicts mean resistance, disobedience, violation, persistence and objections that are visible in society. Conflict theory was first developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) in the mid-nineteenth century to explain inequality and conflict resulting from struggle and competition between two antagonistic social classes (Hayes, 2022). Singer and Small's initiated Correlates-of-War-Project (COW) defines conflicts as violent disputes in which at least one of the

combatant parties is a state, and there are at least 100 battle deaths. (Antonio Milososki & Heinz-Jürgen Axt, 2006). Conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etc.). Also, these conflicts can be assumed as: i) Community conflicts (Muslims are divided as Sunni Muslims, Sitthi Muslims, etc.) and ii) Diplomatic conflicts (India - Pakistan, Israel –Palestine) iii) Environmental resources iv) Ideological (Marxism – Imperialism) v) Religious (within and with other religions like Christianity Vs. Islam) vi) Inter-states (civil wars) vii) Organizational (within and with other communities) viii) Workplaces (between workers and masters- strikes) ix) Family (within the Family) (Sirisudhamma, 2020).

Conflict means any contradiction or clashing interest between two persons or groups. It is an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, dispute, aggression, rivalry, and misunderstanding. So, conflicts may arise due to different perceptions, values, working practices, etc. Gandhi (1958-1994). too saw conflict as both positive and desirable. Therefore, it is better to work on the resolution of conflict rather than avoid it or keep suffering as a result of it. Thomas Hobbes (1985) believed that human beings are selfish by nature and that humanity is characterized by a careless, and indeed relentless, thirst for power. Edmund Burke (2005) saw humanity as inherently conflictual. Sigmund Freud (2002) contends that aggression is carried out in the name of self-preservation, and is inherent to humans. Aggression helps human beings to protect and enhance their existence. However, Gandhi (1958-1994). was in a different league altogether as he believed in the essential goodness of human beings. He had a very positive view of human nature and believed that humans could respond to “the call of the spirit” and rise above selfishness and violence.

In the Pāli literature, the word "conflict" is used as a synonym with Virodha, Viggaha, Sanghattana, VivāDa, Herein, the word “Raṇa” is used. In describing ideological conflicts, that were prevalent among various religious groups, three terms Kalaha (Contention), Viggaha (Dispute), And VivāDa (Debate) have been used quite often (Sirisudhamma, 2015).

The Vedic “Raṇa” means both enjoyment and battle. The word “Raṇa” in Pāli bears many meanings. It means being in seclusion from people (araṇ + yu) and being free from the mist of defilements (kilesā) (a + raṇa). It also means intoxication and desire. Besides that, it can mean war, battle, sin, or fault. Over time, various wars have erupted globally, including historical events like the First and Second World Wars, as well as recent conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine war, the Afghanistan war, and the civil war in Sri Lanka. These conflicts often arise between different nations and

are exacerbated by religious differences. Religion, with its primary aims of fostering happiness and peace among human beings, paradoxically becomes a central factor in some conflicts. Despite religious teachings emphasizing peace, love, and compassion, certain instances reveal that religion can be a catalyst for the initiation of wars. This raises questions about the interpretation and application of religious principles in the context of global conflicts. Interestingly, it has been observed that conflicts involving religious nations are more prevalent than those in secular countries. This paradox underscores the need to explore the reasons why, despite the peaceful messages conveyed by religions, some conflicts are rooted in religious differences. Addressing this paradox becomes crucial for achieving a harmonious global coexistence. The impact of wars extends beyond the immediate participants, affecting the world economy, global peace, and overall sustainability. Wars disrupt international trade, strain diplomatic relations, and divert resources away from addressing pressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and healthcare. In the contemporary world, finding genuine solutions to prevent and resolve conflicts is imperative.

This study seeks to explore solutions to war and conflict by delving into the spiritual teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha. The primary focus is on Buddhist spiritual teachings that center on peace, emphasizing an understanding of the root causes of war and conflict and exploring resolutions based on the principles found in Buddhism. During the period under investigation, two prominent active wars have taken center stage: The Israel-Palestine war that erupted on the 7th of October 2023, spanning over 70 years, and the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022. These conflicts have resulted in the breakdown of essential human needs, leading to the tragic loss of lives daily. Nations affected by these wars have plunged into poverty, causing immense hardships for their populations, who struggle to meet fundamental human necessities such as food, water, healthcare, and clothing. This research is dedicated to identifying viable solutions aimed at mitigating and ultimately eliminating war and conflict worldwide. By doing so, it aspires to contribute to the restoration of global sustainability. The focus of this study is particularly relevant to the ongoing conflicts in the current year, seeking to address the pressing issues that have arisen due to these wars.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines the insights and principles drawn from Buddhist philosophy and practice that can inform and enrich the field of conflict resolution. Conflict can be identified as three types, namely Individual level conflict, Interpersonal conflict, and Group level conflict. Individual-level conflict is when all individuals have conflict within themselves. An individual may have conflicts when his motives or drives are blocked, or he is facing competing roles and goals and is

unable to make decisions. The reasons behind these conflicts may be uncertainty about roles and goals, inability to compare various alternatives available, and unacceptability of the decisions of the company. Most individual conflicts may arise within an employee. Frustration is when an employee is unable to do as per own desires, he/she becomes frustrated. It is the highest level of dissatisfaction which in turn gives rise to conflict within the individual. Frustration arises due to the blockage of the individual's drives or motives before reaching his/her goal. These blocks may be physical or mental/social-psychological. Interpersonal conflict refers to conflict between two or more individuals and is the most common type of conflict. When we live the society, we have to deal with several relations such as parents, friends, family members, teachers, employees, and religious leaders (Sigala Sutta of Diga Nikaya). Therefore, the conflict can arise between the above relations. Group-level conflict can happen mostly within business organizations. Group refers to two or more persons working for some common goals with a predefined structure of role and status relations and having a defined system of values and behavior norms. Groups affect the behavior of their members along with affecting the behavior of other groups and the organization as a whole (Bansal, n.d.).

The Buddhist tradition has a long history of grappling with the nature of human suffering, the root causes of conflict, and the pathways to inner peace and social harmony Karl Marx (1818-1883). One of the central tenets of Buddhist thought is the interdependence of all phenomena, which underscores the interconnected nature of individuals, groups, and nations (Galtung, 1996). This perspective challenges the notion of absolute, fixed identities and encourages a more fluid, relational understanding of the self and the "other" in conflict situations. By cultivating a sense of mutual understanding and shared humanity, Buddhist-inspired approaches to conflict resolution can help diplomats and negotiators move beyond adversarial mindsets and work towards more collaborative solutions (Lederach, 2005). Furthermore, the Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment offers valuable insights for managing the emotional and psychological dimensions of international conflicts (Goleman, 1995). By training diplomats in practices such as breath awareness, loving-kindness meditation, and the recognition of impermanence, these approaches can enhance their ability to remain centered, empathetic, and open-minded in the face of complex, high-stakes negotiations (Berceli & Napoli, 2006; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009).

This literature review suggests that the integration of Buddhist principles and practices into the field of conflict resolution, particularly in the context of international diplomacy, has the potential to contribute to more sustainable and transformative approaches to conflict de-escalation and resolution.

Aparekke Sirisudhamma and Wimalasara (2015) explore the various facets of conflict emergence, attributing the primary reasons to unwholesome emotions like greed, hatred, and delusion within the context of Buddhism. The authors emphatically argue that the complete elimination of conflict is achievable through the eradication of these negative emotional states. While the research sheds light on the root causes of conflicts and their resolution, it falls short of delving into other teachings of Buddha related to conflict resolution and prevention. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining additional aspects of Buddha's teachings on conflict resolution and prevention. By doing so, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Buddhist perspective on addressing conflicts and exploring methods beyond the removal of unwholesome emotions.

Ven. Lien Vein (2019) delves into the introduction of violence and its root causes, examining how conflicts may arise between different parties. The author extensively explores the Buddhist perspective on the crucial role of leadership or rulers in building peace. It specifically addresses the teachings of Buddhism related to conflict resolution, emphasizing the model role that leaders can play in mitigating violence. While the article comprehensively covers the principles of good governance in Buddhism as a means to promote peace, it falls short of encompassing other teachings of Buddha about conflict resolution. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining both resolution and prevention methods for mitigating conflicts, providing a more holistic understanding of Buddhist approaches to handling violence and fostering peace.

Daniele Mazza (2021) examines the sources of conflict, particularly drawing from the Pali Canon, a significant Buddhist scripture. The research delves into the root causes of conflict according to Buddhist principles and explores the methods prescribed by Buddhism for conflict resolution. Notably, the article sheds light on the Buddha's approaches, emphasizing arbitration, mediation, and communitarian decisions as effective means to control disputes among parties.

3. Methodology

This research primarily uses a qualitative research method through content analysis of written related materials on conflict and peace. These sources are considered as key documents for the study. Additionally, data is collected from Pali Canon sources.

Some of the main teachings of the Buddha related to peace are highly regarded and form a significant part of the data collection. The methodology involves a thorough examination of these texts to identify and interpret themes and patterns relevant to the study's objectives. This comprehensive content analysis helps in understanding the

perspectives and teachings on peace as presented in both traditional and contemporary literature.

4. Discussion

4.1 Root Causes of Conflict

The non-fulfillment of basic human needs is the cause of conflict. John Burton (1990) propounded the basic human needs theory. Needs refer to basic human requirements for the continuation and propagation of life: material (food, shelter, health care, employment- freedom from want), cultural (right to religion, language), and social needs (respect, dignity, and freedom from fear). The need for life to be perceived as being predictable and safe is extremely important. These needs are non-negotiable and universal, and their satisfaction is essential for human development and social stability. These universal needs must be satisfied if protracted social conflicts are to be resolved. Buddha put the conflict in the context of the first noble truth and traced the root cause of every conflict to some unwholesome states of the human mind (Vijitha, 2019). According to the Buddhist explanation, the conflict arises through the mental factors of the mind called the unwholesome roots; greed can be eliminated through generosity, helpfulness, and cooperation, hatred can be eliminated through kindness, tolerance and forgiveness and delusion is a potentially harmful consequence.

Once again sensual pleasures are seen as the root cause of every conflict. As per the Buddha's teaching disputes may occur at different levels such as among kings (Rājānopi Rājūhi Vivādentī), religious groups (Rāhmaṇāpi Brāhmaṇehi Vivadanti), among villagers (Gapahaṭṭipigahapatīhi Vivadanti) and within the same family (Mātāpi Puttena Vivadati) (Mazza, 2021). As per the Buddhist teaching there are six roots of conflict. Namely;

1. Angry and aggressive
2. Contemptuous and insolent
3. Envious and misery (Issa – maccariya)
4. Fraudulent and deceitful
5. Evil wishes and wrong views
6. Hold his own view tenaciously

Buddha explains the two concepts that need to be practiced in our lives. This concept is very important to protect peace in society. The conflict arises due to the lack of two characteristics of mind; first one is Kāmehivisamyuttam that is departing from the sensual pleasure and the second is Vitatanham means eliminate the craving. It could

be argued that the main cause of ongoing conflicts (ex: Russia and Ukraine, Palestine, and Israel) and the previous war in Sri Lanka are due to the sensual desires of the people. As per the Buddha's teaching, when we eliminate desires, war does not arise in the world. Conflict means a serious disagreement or clash, generally a protracted one, among individuals or groups of people. Sometimes this clash arises out of incompatible and different goals among the parties that see the other as an obstacle or a competitor in achieving their own goal (Digvijaysinh, 2013). Other times it arises out of a different thought process, attitude, priorities, perception, and interests even though both parties aim at the same goal (Dean, 2006). Conflicts can happen at a macro-level (i.e., among nation-states, ethnic groups, etc.) or at a micro- level (within a family, an organization, etc.). Mahakaccānathere explains when people have wrong views and cravings it will be the reason for the occurrence of self- identification or ego. because of self-identification or ego there are another seven kinds of latent causes of conflict.

- Kāmaraga - the latent tendency to sensual pleasure
- Patiga - the latent tendency to aversion
- Ditti - the latent tendency to speculative opinion
- Vicikiccā - the latent tendency to speculative doubt
- Māna - the latent tendency to conceit and pride
- Bhavarāga - the latent tendency to crave continuous existence
- Avija - the latent tendency to ignorance

Due to these 7 kinds of latent there arise taking up rods and bladed weapons, arguments, quarrels, disputes, accusations, divisive tale-bearing, and false speech. When people eliminate this kind of latent and cultivate minds in a righteous way, gradually conflict can be stopped. Madhupindikasutta of Majjima Nikaya the Buddha's teaching pointed out the people experience normally two ways, attraction, and repulsion. People try to take ownership on attractive things and make quarrel and conflict to get everything. On the other hand, they repulsed unlike things. Through these dislikes, arise the conflict (Madhupindikasutta – Majjima Nikaya). People go battle and kill each other because of desire lust or craving. Buddhism does not admire temporary solutions for conflict or war (Madhupindikasutta of Majjima nikaya). “Unoloke Atiththo Thanha Daso” the people of this world are slaves of the craving and it is difficult to give up (Rattapala Sutta – Majjima Nikaya) that leads to a situation of conflict. However, as per the Budha's teaching, until someone attains the status of Nibbana, the craving could be eliminated.

Diga Nikaya Cakkawatti Sihanada Sutta and Kuta Dantha Sutta mention about conflict and war. According to this Sutta, the major causes of the conflict or trying to maximize resources and material wealth. When people try to collect material wealth automatically competition between people or groups of people or countries. The completion gradually turns into the conflicts. However, as per the Buddha's teaching, people should think about the impermanence of material things, and when people think about the impermanence of everything, they do not engage in any conflict. (Cakkawatti Siha Nada Sutta, Diga Nikaya), (Kutadantha Sutta, Diga Nikaya) Sakka Pahana Sutta of Sanyuktha Nikaya, King of God Sakka came to the Buddha and asked Gods and men always to plan to live without quarrelling and fighting each other. But they always tend to quarrel and fight. Buddha explained that two kinds of psychological reasons that are related to the generated conflict; 1) "Issa" that means envy, dislike, aversion, jealousy, and 2) "Maccariya" that means misery.

The concept of "Issa" defines as the dissatisfaction of other's achievement of goals. Today, many people are very jealous of other's improvement. "Maccariya" is unlike in sharing knowledge with others (Sakkapahna Sutta, Sanyutta Nikaya). When considering about reason for the war or conflicts craving and pride are the basic reasons. Buddha's advice to his followers eliminates pride from their lives. Many social conflicts, civil conflicts and armed conflicts arise due to bad leadership of the rulers. The Buddha's teaching for the leaders is to take away from prejudices.

"Ababbo Candāgatiṃgantum, Dosa Agatiṃgantum, Bhaya Agatiṃgantum, Moha Agatiṃgantum" means , Lotus, Hatred, Fear, Illusion. The leader should not be concerned with facts such as gender, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, and nationality when they are going to make decisions. They always should get right decisions without considering any other facts. Normally, in society, we can see powerful people who engage in the wrong business. They take political security and evade the law. Then normal people do not trust in court, police, and political leaders. Sometimes they get political power and do illegal things. In many countries, war arises due to the unreasonable treatment of other nations and religions. When one nation or religion takes more facilities based on their nation and religion and another puts away without giving any respect because of their nation or religion at the kind of occasion civil conflict arises.

4.2 Buddhist Perspective of Preventive Conflict

The prevention of conflict is the wish of all people. According to the present global issue is a conflict which the Buddha's teaching can provide suitable action for prevention of the conflict or war. Dhammapada mentioned that:

*“Nahi verani verani – sammanthida kudachanam
Averenaca samnathi – esa dhamma sananthano”*

Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world but it is appeased only by loving-kindness that is an ancient law (Dhammapada, Yamaka waggaya, 05). Hatred is never appeased by hatred. Hatred is appeased by non-hatred. That is the Buddhist teaching about hatred. If all people practice this attitude, people will not have conflict with others. Buddha advises followers to practice “samacariya” harmonious behavior with others which leads to inner peace among the others. The Buddha’s teaching is specially for preventing and stopping war and conflicts that occur inside of the human mind in society. What does the ascetic teach? What does he explain? (Kimvādisamano, kimakhāki’ ti). Asked by the King Dhandapali (MajjimaNikaya, Madhupindika sutta, 2006). This teaching is such that one does not have conflict with anyone in this world with its gods, Māras, and Brahmās, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans, and also it is such that perceptions do not underlie the Brahmin who lives detached from sensual pleasures, without doubting, stripped of worry, and rid of craving for rebirth in this or that state. In the Sāmagāma Sutta the Buddha speaks about seven ways to settle disputes: “Ananda, there are these seven kinds of settlement of litigation. For the settlement and pacification of litigations whenever they arise: removal of litigation by confrontation may be provided, removal of litigation on account of memory may be provided, removal of litigation on account of past insanity may be provided, the effecting of acknowledgment of an offense, the opinion of the majority, the pronouncement of bad character against someone, and covering over with grass” Rattapala Sutta – Majjima Nikaya Diga Nikaya Cakkawatti Sihanada Sutta And Kuta Data Sutta mention that conflict and war. According to this sutta, the major cause of the conflict or war is natural resources and material wealth; when people try to collect material wealth automatically competition between people or groups of people or countries arise. The completion gradually turns into a conflict. However, the Buddha advice to people is to think about the impermanence of material things. When people think about the impermanence of everything, they do not engage the any conflict. Dhammapada says that:

*“Yo sahasam sahasena – sangame manuse jine
Ekanca jeyya attānam – sace sangamauttamo”*

The man who won himself from the craving is the greater winner than the one who won the thousands of war against the others (Dhammapada ,Sahassa Wagga,103.4). Buddha always advises people to search about themselves not about others. When people search for others, they tend to start to conflict with others. Buddha always

advises people to search for themselves and eliminate weak points. Once the Buddha was under a tree and meditating. Suddenly, a group of princesses (Bhadda Waggiya) came to the Buddha and asked “bhanthe, did you see the women who ran from here.” Buddha preached to them to search themselves not about others (Vinaya Pitakaya 1 Mahakhandakaya, 2006). Further Dhammapada:

*“Nāparesam vilomāni – nāparesam katākatam
Attanāwa awekkeyya - katani akatanica”*

“Do not think about what others have not done or done, think about what you did or did not do.” In normal life, people always think about the other's responsibilities and duties which we have to do to others. It is also the reason for conflict. So, the Buddha advises people to identify their responsibilities and duties and do them properly (Dhammapada, Puppha wagga, 50, 7). In Buddhism, the advice to Buddhist followers is to spread loving kindness without hating their enemies. In the Kakacupama Sutta of Majjima Nikaya Buddha admires a monk who spreads loving kindness to thieves who cut his body parts and severely tortured him (Kakacupama Sutta - Majjima Nikaya).

7.1 Buddhist Perspective of Conflict Resolution

In order to permanently solve conflicts, Buddhism would suggest that these unwholesome states be uprooted through mindfulness of our habitual behavioral patterns (Vijitha, 2019). Buddha tried to solve conflicts both by inviting people to analyze their mind process and by using external means of conflict resolution such as arbitration, mediation, and discussion to reach a consensus (Mazza, 2021).

“Jayamveram pasahathi, Dukkham sethi parājito”

The winner gets the hatred from the others, the loser suffers due to his loss. Both parties of the war suffer in their mind. According to Buddhism through battle, no one wins. The Buddha emphasizes the importance of winning their mind from defilements. Buddhism is essentially a peaceful tradition; nothing in Buddhist scripture gives any support to the use of violence as a way to resolve conflict.

Buddha points out, I do not make conflict fight with others “Na Kenaci Loke Viggayha Tittati” (Majjimanikaya, Madhupindaka Sutta Majjima Nikaya B J T. 2006 P. 275, 2006). This is a very philosophical idea. Buddhism spread throughout the world very peacefully. There is no bloodshed in the history of Buddhism compared to other religions (Rāhulavāda Sutta -Majjima Nikaya, 2006). “Pacca Vekkhithwa Paccavekkithwa Kāyena Kammā Kātabbam, Pacca Vekkhithwa Paccavekkithwa Vācāya Dhammam Kātabbam, Pacca Vekkhithwa Paccavekkithwa Manasā

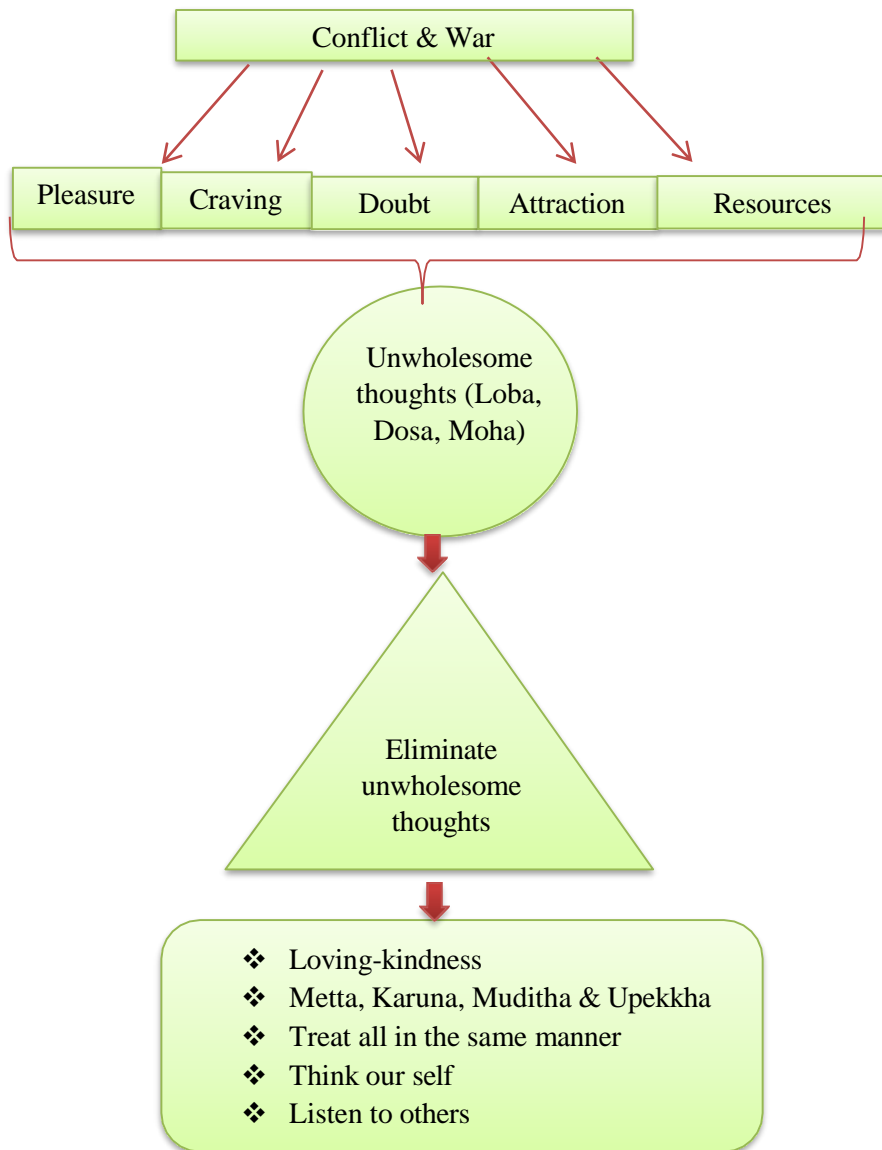
Dhammam Kātabbam.” If a person or group of persons can protect their words, activities, and minds, there will never be conflict. So according to Buddhist teaching, we should protect the above three doors carefully. Then we have to eliminate the conflict in the world.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, conflict is a pervasive aspect of human existence, arising from differences in beliefs, needs, and values. It manifests in various forms, from individual and interpersonal conflicts to broader societal and international disputes. Buddhism offers valuable insights into conflict prevention and resolution by emphasizing inner peace, mindfulness, and the elimination of unwholesome mental states. The key principles include practicing loving-kindness, understanding impermanence, and focusing on one's responsibilities rather than others. Buddhism promotes non-violence and encourages individuals and societies to seek harmony and consensus through peaceful means, ultimately aiming for the cessation of conflict and the cultivation of inner and outer peace. In addition, the researcher has recommended a Diagram which is “The Diagram of Conflict Process of Buddhism”. This diagram will help to easily understand the proses of conflict, the cause of conflict, and how it can be solved according to the Buddhist teaching of conflict and resolutions of the conflict.

Based on the above discussion, Figure 01 presented how to understand conflict processes, causes, and resolutions according to Buddhist teachings.

Figure 01: Understanding Conflict Processes, Causes, and Resolutions According to Buddhist Teachings



6. Limitations and Further Research

While numerous religious doctrines offer teachings on peace and conflict resolution, current research predominantly leans towards leveraging Buddhist principles for conflict resolution. The focus is primarily on delving into the Pali Canon to unearth resolutions related to conflict. Researchers identify key areas for future exploration in conflict resolution, including how various religious teachings address conflicts, the diverse peace messages within religions, the commodification of religious practices on a global scale, the burgeoning religious tourism industry, and the potential integration of artificial intelligence in conflict resolution.

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Authors of IJGPPA 2024

Yashoda Bandara, Senior Lecturer, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Studies, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka, Email- yashoda@mgt.rjt.ac.lk

Kumudinei Dissanayake, Professor, Department of Management and Organization Studies, Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Email- kumudisa@mos.cmb.ac.lk

Arosha S. Adikaram, Professor, Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Email- arosha@hrm.cmb.ac.lk

W. M. Sanjeewani K. Weerasekara, Faculty of Management Studies & Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, Email- wmsanjeewani@yahoo.com

G. Dinoka N. Perera, Professor, Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management Studies & Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, Email- dinokagnp@sjp.ac.lk

R. L. S. Fernando, Senior Professor, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, Email- rlsf@sjp.ac.lk

E. A. I. Kularathna, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, Email- chapa.eaik@gmail.com

G. K. A. Sewwandi, Sri Lanka Administrative Service, Sri Lanka, Email- sewwandigka1990@gmail.com

L. A. Pavithra Madhuwanthi, Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, Email- pavithra@sjp.ac.lk

S. A. S. Dismi Jayasuriya, Sri Lanka Administrative Service, Sri Lanka, Email- dismijayasuriya@gmail.com

Rev. Bingiriye Sunandabodhi, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Buddhist and Pail University of Sri Lanka, Email- sunandaboodhi@gmail.com

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For Any Queries Please Contact:

Senior Professor R. Lalitha S. Fernando
Editor in Chief - IJGPPA
Research Centre for Governance and Public Policy
Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.
ijgppa@sjp.ac.lk
(+94) 112802006

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