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Political Literacy of Undergraduates with Special Reference to Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at University of Ruhuna

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Abstract

Political literacy is a significant factor that guides citizens to correctly use the power of the vote. The literature has emphasised the drawbacks of liberal democracy due to the inactive citizens who only participate during elections and lack knowledge of political phenomena or attitudes, affecting the decision-making process. Identifying the factors affecting the political literacy of undergraduates at five levels: political expertise, knowledge, awareness, interest, and participation, was the core objective of the study. The sub-objective was to identify the difference among the levels of each factor. The sample was 299 undergraduates in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka, selected using a simple random sampling method. The primary data was analysed using descriptive and inferential analytical tools. The study used Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and Bonferroni post-hoc analysis to identify interdependent variables varying with five aspects of political literacy utilising Wilk's Lambda and Hotelling's Trace test statistics. Academic year, frequency of political discussions in the family, colleagues' interest in politics, participation of societies and social works in the university, medium of studying, and nature of the living area were recognised as the significant factors that affect political literacy. The study revealed significant differences in five aspects of political literacy across various levels of the variables considered. Hence, there is variation in the political literacy of the undergraduates according to social factors. Considering the social factors, relevant authorities should implement a proper mechanism to enhance political literacy among the young generation.

Keywords: Bonferroni Post Hoc Analysis, Hotelling's Trace test statistic, Multivariate Analysis of Variance, Political Literacy, Wilk's Lambda

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

The political literacy of citizens is a decisive factor that determines the whole process in any country. People's Action for Force and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) has not conducted proper research to evaluate the political literacy of citizens in Sri Lanka, and it is a critical issue with the economic crisis and the corrupted political behaviour in the country within the last few years. Political literacy is identifying various aspects of voting, including the value and power of the vote, and, after the voting process, whether their vote becomes enforced within the democratic structure to establish the factors for the majority's well-being in society (Vaffoor, 2022). According to most research about South Asian third-world countries, the drawbacks of liberal democracy are due to the inactive citizens who are active only during the period of elections and do not have a knowledge understanding regarding political phenomena related to the decision to vote or a proper attitude other

than the factors related to the leaders.

(Putri & Mubarak, 2020) carried out a study using a quantitative approach based on positivistic philosophy to study the influence of political literacy on the political participation of beginner voters, selecting a sample using a probabilistic approach, limiting the study to the regional elections and only for the four cities in West Sumatra, setting the core objective as to analyse the effect of political information against political participation, which may affect beginner voters, utilising the ANOVA technique, and producing effective political literacy design against novice voters through organisational effectiveness. The research was limited to a result for the magnitude of political literacy's influence on political participation of 59.8%, as the remaining part may be influenced by other variables not examined in the study.

Political literacy has been studied in various aspects, such as the dimension of citizenship education, by Perveen and Awan (2017), who identified ten elements of political literacy to analyse political literacy as a dimension of citizenship education in the secondary school curriculum of Pakistan in a qualitative approach. The study revealed a deplorable situation regarding the inclusion of political literacy as a dimension of citizenship education in the curriculum at the secondary school level in Pakistan.

Hunter & Rack (2016) studied based on advancing young citizens' political literacy, focusing on the social sciences curriculum under the qualitative approach, revealing how secondary students view themselves as political beings, raise political ideas, and have critical evaluations about political participation. Data was obtained from 48 secondary students in New Zealand based on classroom-based research that sought students' ideas about politics through e-questionnaires, focus-group conversations, and dialogue with leading social science teachers. The study showed that young citizens seeking to understand explicit political concepts and language and engaging with real-life issues that prompt political discussion and decision-making are essential for allowing their voices to be heard.

Köksal & Erol (2021b) developed a scale to measure political literacy utilising exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The study consisted of 440 undergraduates studying at a university in Istanbul. The exploratory factor analysis result indicated that the scale consists of 24 items and five factors, and 63,852% of the variance is explained. Factors were recognised as political expertise, knowledge, awareness, interest, and participation. Confirmatory factor analysis provided evidence to determine that the scale had 24 items and fit indices of the structure were sufficient. The study recommended the validity and reliability of the scale for measuring the political literacy skills of individuals.

After reviewing the literature, most research was carried out qualitatively. Perveen & Awan (2017) and Hunter & Rack (2016) carried out a qualitative approach addressing improving the political literacy of citizens or undergraduates based on curriculum development. Even though Putri & Mubarak (2020) studied political literacy based on a quantitative approach to detect the effect of political information against political participation, which may affect beginner voters, the study was limited to studying only the impact of political literacy on political participation, mainly addressing only one aspect of political literacy. Therefore, a research gap could be detected by using a quantitative approach to study the factors that affect political literacy on a standard scale.

Undergraduates are the most recent population to vote for the first time and will be freshmen for this decision. Hence, it is essential to know how political literacy varies with the other social factors among undergraduates, who are treated as the most intelligent portion of society.

Research Problem

Political literacy is one of the decisive factors that control the whole process of any country indirectly since the leaders are appointed through the power of the vote of the citizens. Political literacy of citizens persuaded to vote and the selection of leaders who have the proper mechanism for the country's development. Due to the economic crisis in the Sri Lankan context in 2022-2024, the whole political structure of the country was criticised, and there was doubt about the political literacy of the Sri Lankan citizens and whether the democratic structure may play a proper role in the country. Hence, it is an essential requirement to study the factors that affect the citizens' political literacy; there appears to be a gap in knowledge to proceed. Undergraduates are the most recent population to vote for the first time or will be freshmen. For this decision, it is essential to address the political literacy of undergraduates in the Sri Lankan context.

Objectives

The study's main objective was to identify the factors affecting the political literacy of undergraduates at five levels: political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest, and political participation. The sub-objective was to identify how levels of factors incorporated with political expertise, knowledge, awareness, interest, and participation vary due to the relevant factors.

Significance of the Study

(Studying political literacy among undergraduates is an essential requirement to evaluate the shadow of future goals, development, and policymaking in Sri Lanka since undergraduates are treated as the youngest and most intelligent portion, and their power of vote will be incorporated into the whole process of the country shortly. Identifying social factors that may influence the political literacy of undergraduates facilitates ensuring the state's capability to provide effective programs to enhance the political literacy of undergraduates. In addition, the study's results can be utilised to implement the existing policies with special reference to the factors associated with political literacy in the future. This may support preplanning designed programs and projects that are compatible with the factors related to political literacy.

Limitation of the Study

With the effect of cultural diversities, sociocultural diversities might impact political literacy. The study is carried out without considering cultural and psychological factors such as different regions, ethnic groups, attitudes, personal experiences, motivation, etc. In addition to that, the measures used to evaluate political literacy were limited to five aspects: political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest, and political participation. Involvement with political parties has not been thoroughly examined in the study.

2. Materials and Methods

The data to be analysed comprise independent variables of the academic year, family income level, frequency of making political discussions in the family, colleagues' interest in politics, participation of societies and social works in the university, medium of studying, nature of the living area, and dependent variables, which are political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest, and political participation, which were confirmed by a principle component analysis and factor analysis Köksal & Erol (2021b).

All the independent variables were categorical, while the dependent variables comprised five aspects. They formed matrices using a simple index based on the scale introduced by Köksal and Erol (2021b).

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework
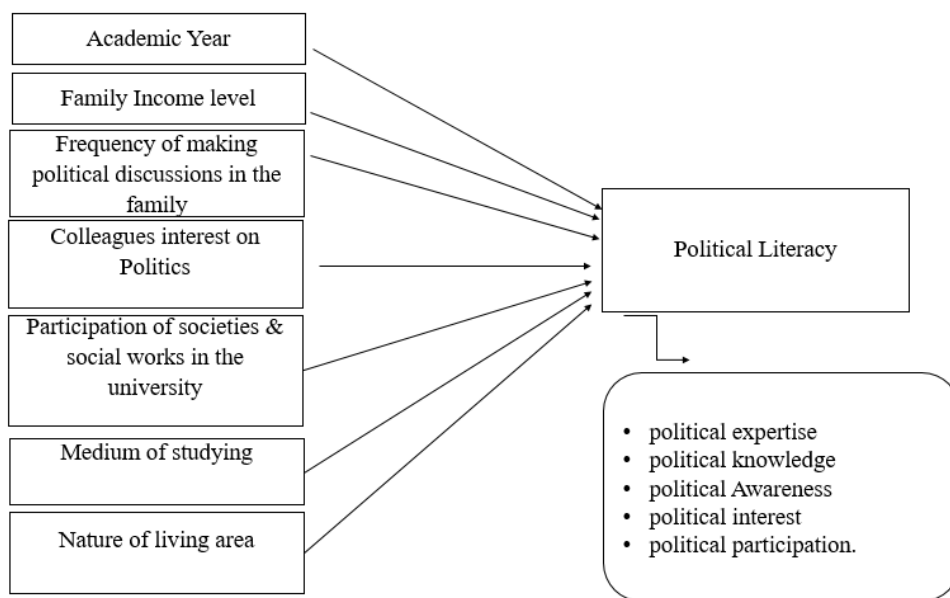
Source: Survey Data, 2024

It was used with 299 undergraduates from FHSS at the University of Ruhuna (2022/2023), utilising a simple random sampling technique, and data was collected using a questionnaire. SPSS software was used in the study. The response rate is 95.83%. (Table 01)

Table 1: Distribution of Population and Sample

Academic Year	Number of students	Sample Size (12% from population)
1st Year	752	(752*12)/100 = 90.24
2nd Year	697	697*12)/100 = 83.64
3rd Year	742	742*12)/100 = 89.04
4th Year	402	402*12)/100 = 48.24
Total	2593	312

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Descriptive analysis and inferential analysis were used as analytical techniques. MANOVA was utilised as the primary inferential statistical method of analysis to achieve the core objective of the study, using Wilk's lambda and Hotelling's trace as the test statistics to detect the significant effects of independent variables on political literacy. Bonferroni post-hoc analysis was utilised to explore the considerable impact of comparisons at each independent variable level on political literacy.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA): The MANOVA can be used for quantitative variables to detect whether the variable has a significant mean difference among the levels of a categorical variable with more than two levels. Wilk's lambda test statistics were used in the analysis. Hotelling's trace test statistics can be used for quantitative variables to detect whether the variable has a significant difference between the two levels of a categorical variable containing only two. To test whether there are differences between the means of the identified groups of subjects on a combination of dependent variables, the null hypothesis used in MANOVA is:

$$H_0 : \begin{bmatrix} \mu_{11} \\ \mu_{21} \\ \mu_{31} \\ \mu_{41} \\ \mu_{51} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \mu_{12} \\ \mu_{22} \\ \mu_{32} \\ \mu_{42} \\ \mu_{52} \end{bmatrix} = ... = \begin{bmatrix} \mu_{1g} \\ \mu_{2g} \\ \mu_{3g} \\ \mu_{4g} \\ \mu_{5g} \end{bmatrix}$$

Bonferroni post-hoc analysis: Bonferroni post-hoc analysis was utilised to explore the significant effect of the factor in the comparison at each level. The post-hoc analysis detected the exact levels of the categorical independent variables, which were performed with a significant mean difference in MANOVA. Cronbach's alpha: Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the scales used to measure political literacy.

3. Result and Discussion

Preliminary Analysis

The distribution of the target population and the independent variables considered in the study were considered under preliminary analysis.

Figure 2: Distribution of Population
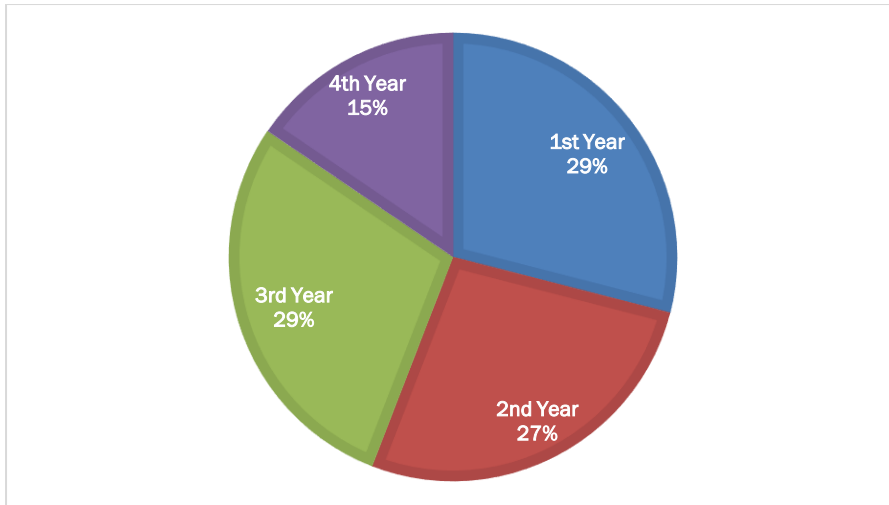
Source: Survey Data, 2024

Figure 02 illustrates how the population is distributed over the academic years. It shows approximately an equal percentage of undergraduates are in the faculty in their 1st year, 2nd year, and 3rd year. The lowest rate of undergraduates is in their 4th year.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was utilised to test the scale's reliability in measuring political literacy.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Test	Value
Cronbach's Alpha	0.767

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The scale is reliable since Cronbach's alpha is 0.767 and the value is greater than 0.7. (Table 02)

MANOVA

The dependent variable was a matrix with five aspects: political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest, and political participation. It was tested whether there was a significant difference in those five aspects relevant to the independent variables.

Table 3: Results of MANOVA - Wilk's Lambda

Factor	Wilk's Lambda	P value
Academic Year	0.841	0.000
Family Income Level	0.843	0.000
Frequency of making Political discussion in the family	0.856	0.000
Colleagues' interest in politics	0.741	0.000
Participation of societies & social works in the university	0.810	0.000

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Since the P value is less than the significant level of 0.05 in all the factors, academic year, family income level, and frequency of political discussion in the family, colleagues' interest in politics, participation in societies, and social works in the university show a significant mean difference in political literacy of respondents at the 5% level of significance. (Table 03).

Table 4: Results of MANOVA - Hotling's Trace

Factor	Hotling's Trace	P value
Medium	0.059	0.005
Nature of Living Area	0.050	0.013

Source: Survey Data, 2024

It was performed with strong statistical evidence to retain the decision that there is a significant mean difference in political literacy due to the medium of study and the nature of the living area since the corresponding P values are less than 0.05 at the 5% significance level. (Table 04).

Assumptions of MANOVA

MANOVA is comprised of three main assumptions.

Assumption 01: $X_{l1}, X_{l2}, X_{l3}, ..., X_{ln_l},$ is a random sample of size n_l from a population with mean μ_l, $l = 1, 2, 3, ..., g$ The random samples from different populations are independent.

Assumption 02: All populations have a standard covariance matrix Σ.

Assumption 03: Each population is multivariate normal. (Assumption 03 can be relaxed by appealing to the central limit theorem.)

Johnson & Wichern (2007)

Assumption 02 was tested with Box's M Test. ($H_0 : \Sigma_1 = \Sigma_2 = \Sigma_3 = ... = \Sigma_5$ Hence, the P value was> 0.05, and assumption 02 was satisfied. Assumption 03 was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk Test (H_0 : Population is multivariate normal). Hence, the P value > 0.05, assumption 03 was satisfied.

Bonferroni Post-Hoc Analysis

The Bonferroni post-hoc analysis utilised to achieve the sub-objective of the study was to detect the exact levels of factors considered, which may vary in five aspects of political literacy.

Table 5: Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Analysis – Academic Year

Political Literacy	Year	Mean Difference	Std. Error	P value
Political Expertise	Second Year &First Year	8.32	3.129	0.049
	Second Year &Third Year	10.48	2.578	0.000
Political Knowledge	Fourth Year & Third Year	17.09	6.084	0.032
Political Awareness	Fourth Year &Third Year	20.24	6.415	0.011
	Fourth Year &First Year	19.29	6.891	0.033
Political Participation	Fourth Year &Second Year	21.06	7.170	0.021

Source: Survey Data, 2024

A significant mean difference was observed in political expertise in the second and first years (mean difference = 8.32, S.E. = 3.129) and in the second and third years (mean difference = 10.48, S.E. = 2.578). Comparatively, there are significant mean differences between the fourth and third years in political knowledge (mean difference = 17.09, S.E. = 6.084) and political awareness (mean difference = 20.24, S.E. = 6.415). Political participation was significantly different in first-year, second-year, and third-year students with fourth-year students since the P value is less than the significant level of 0.05 at the 5% level of significance. (Table 5).
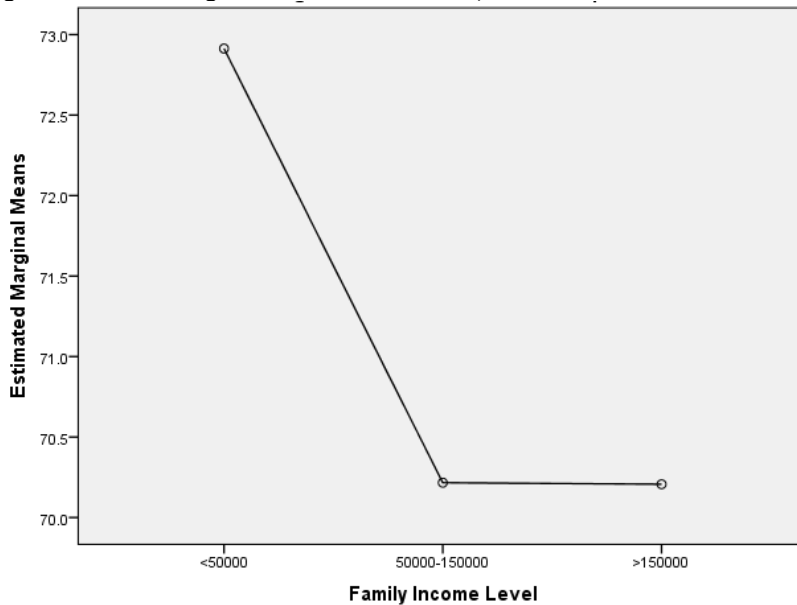
Table 6: Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Analysis – Family Income Level

Political Literacy	Income Level	Mean Difference	Std. Error	P value
Political Knowledge	more than 150000 &Less than 50000	9.01	3.286	0.039
	100000-150000& 50000-100000	10.20	3.474	0.022
	100000-150000 & more than 150000	13.33	4.559	0.022
Political Interest	Less than 50000 & 50000-100000	7.03	1.628	0.000
	Less than 50000 & more than 150000	11.27	3.568	0.011
Political Participation	100000-150000 & more than150000	16.56	4.794	0.004

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The findings indicated that a majority of respondents faced a high level of academic Since the P value is less than the significant level of 0.05, the analysis used statistical evidence to confirm the significant mean difference in political knowledge, political interest, and political participation between different family income levels. More than Rs. 150000 and less than Rs. 50000, Rs. 100000-Rs. 150000 and Rs. 50000-Rs. 100000, and Rs. 100000-Rs. 150000 and more than Rs. 150000 family income levels show a significant mean difference in political knowledge. The corresponding mean differences and SEs are mean difference = 9.01, S.E. = 3.286; mean difference = 10.20, S.E. = 3.474; and mean difference = 13.33, S.E. = 4.559. Political interest was associated with a significant mean difference between less than Rs. 50000 and Rs. 50000-Rs. 100000 family income levels (mean difference = 7.03, S.E. = 1.628). Political participation significantly differed between less than Rs. 50000 & more than Rs. 150000 and Rs. 100000-Rs. 150000 & more than Rs. 150000 family income levels (mean difference = 11.27, S.E. = 3.586, mean difference = 16.56, S.E. = 4.794) (Table 6).

Figure 3: Estimated Marginal Means of Political Participation

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Table 7: Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Analysis – Frequency of Making Family Discussions on Politics

Political Literacy	Frequency of Making Family Discussions on Politics	Mean Difference	Std. Error	P value
Political Knowledge	No discussions & generally	9.48	1.871	0.000
	No discussions & rarely	6.70	2.228	0.017
Political Interest	No discussions & generally	6.27	2.180	0.026
	No discussions & generally	6.82	2.349	0.024
Political Participation	No discussions & generally	9.48	1.871	0.000

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Post-hoc analysis provided enough statistical evidence to confirm a significant mean difference in political expertise between the two levels. No discussions and generally having political discussion categories (mean difference = 9.48, S.E. = 1.871). No discussions and rarely having political discussions (mean difference = 6.70, S.E. = 2.228). Political interest and participation also showed significant mean differences between no discussions and generally having political discussion categories (mean difference = 6.27, S.E. = 2.180, and mean difference = 6.82, S.E. = 2.349). (Table 7).

Table 8: Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Analysis – Colleagues' Interest in Politics

Political Literacy	Colleagues' Interest in Politics	Mean Difference	Std. Error	P value
Political Expertise	Low & very low	16.53	2.596	0.000
	Moderate & very low	13.27	2.446	0.000
	High & very low	12.90	2.587	0.000
	Very high & very low	17.02	3.720	0.000

Political Knowledge	Very high & very low	16.53	4.442	0.002
	Very high & low	12.51	3.793	0.011
	Very high & Moderate	10.75	3.649	0.035
	Very high & high	14.88	3.784	0.001
Political Awareness	Very high& low	12.78	4.052	0.018
	Very high & high	12.52	4.043	0.021
Political Interest	Very high & high	12.30	3.762	0.012

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, and political interest were significantly different in the different levels of Colleagues' interest in politics, as the independent variable levels showed smaller P values than the significant level of 0.05. (Table 8).

Table 8: Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Analysis – Participation of Societies and Social Works in the University

Political Literacy	Participation of Societies and Social Works in the University	Mean Difference	Std. Error	P value
Political Expertise	Low & Very Low	7.39	2.366	0.020
	Moderate & Very Low	8.64	2.274	0.002
	High & Very Low	11.87	2.637	0.000
	Very high & Very Low	15.66	3.906	0.001
Political Knowledge	Very high & Very Low	16.96	4.531	0.002
	Very high & Low	13.15	4.041	0.013
Political Awareness	High & Low	7.98	2.406	0.010
Political Interest	Very high & High	12.20	4.267	0.046

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, and political interest were significantly different in the different levels of participation of societies and social works in the university, as the levels of the independent variables showed smaller P values than the significant level of 0.05. (Table 9).

4. Conclusion

MANOVA made strong statistical evidence to prove that political literacy, political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest, and political participation significantly differed based on academic year, family income level, frequency of making political discussions in the family, colleagues' interest in politics, participation of societies and social works in the university, medium of study, and nature of the living area, achieving the core objective of the study. The Bonferroni post-hoc analysis detected that the exact levels of factors considered differed in the five aspects of political literacy. In addition, the statistical analysis provided evidence to detect no significant difference in political interest due to the academic year. There was no significant difference in political expertise and political awareness due to the family income level, even though there was a substantial difference in other aspects measured in political literacy due to

the family income level. Further, there was no statistical evidence proving a significant difference in proper political knowledge and awareness due to family discussions on politics. It may impact a lack of an appropriate source of information related to political phenomena in families. Hence, there was a variation in the political literacy of the undergraduates according to their social factors. It is suggested that a proper mechanism be implemented to enhance political literacy among the young generation, considering the social aspects of relevant authorities. The future research implications may be compared among the faculties and universities to detect the variation due to relevant factors such as involvement with political parties and psychological and cultural factors that may impact political literacy.

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