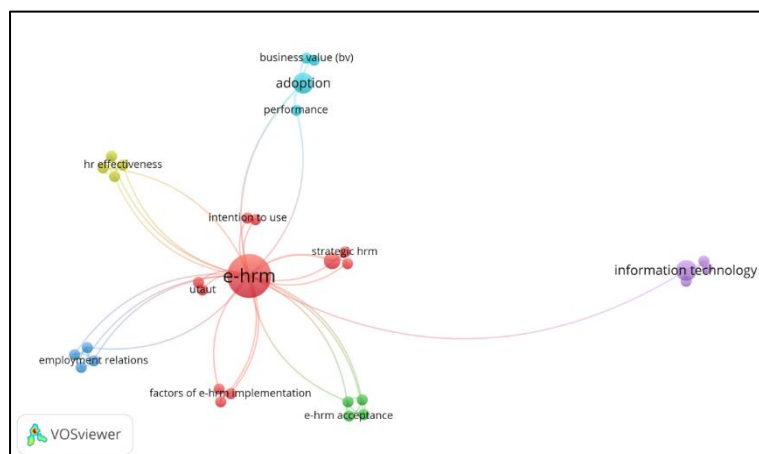
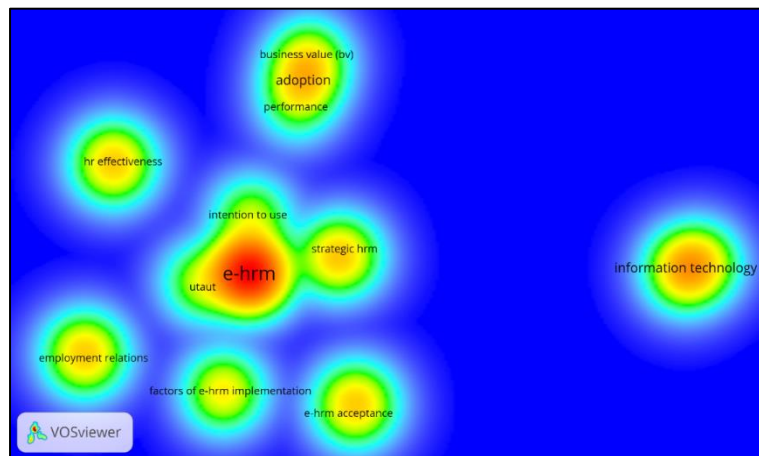


# Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences





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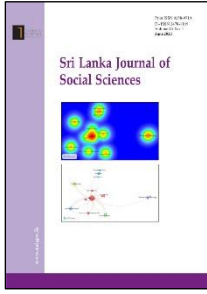
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## EDITORIAL

# Why a proactive research culture is necessary for advancing social sciences in Sri Lanka?

This editorial points to the need for developing a positive research culture for advancing social science research in Sri Lanka. This is not to say that a positive attitude towards research is absent among social scientists and the scientific community in general in Sri Lanka. On the contrary, there is an emerging recognition that social science inputs are necessary for tackling the various challenging problems facing the country today. However, what is lacking is a firm faith in building a local social science knowledge base for exploring various approaches for understanding critical issues facing the country, constant debates about relevant issues and a critical engagement with the social, economic, and political environment in which we find ourselves. This is what I call a “proactive research culture” where we constantly turn to new research for generating new knowledge and finding answers to serious problems affecting the current and future generations.

First let me backtrack for a moment and try to articulate what is meant by research culture.

### What is a Research Culture?

According to one definition (University of Aberdeen, 2023), “Research culture encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities”. It influences researchers’ career paths and determines the way that research is conducted, communicated and used for social development. A research culture is a culture that looks towards new knowledge and new research for addressing problems identified by the research community, industry, social activists, the policy makers, and the public at large. Also, it incorporates a tradition of interrogating existing knowledge and exploring alternative ways of understanding issues from different perspectives. I see this as a key feature of liberal arts education and the social science mindset that should guide knowledge production and application of the knowledge so produced for addressing human problems.

### Knowledge Production in the Global Periphery

Knowledge production in the contemporary world is by and large determined by inequalities in knowledge production originating from the colonial era. For instance, an article on research culture in the Caribbean universities stated the following:

“We contend that research culture in the Caribbean comes up against the strictures of post-colonial dependence, university education in the region being *largely a one-way traffic of ideas from metropolitan centers to island peripheries.*” (Lewis & Simmons, 2010: p. 337, emphasis added).

The structural inequality in scientific knowledge production in the contemporary world and the resulting dependency syndrome in knowledge production are increasingly recognized as key challenges all sciences are facing. This should, however, not be seen as a deterrent for developing a research culture in countries in the global south. On the contrary, a proactive research culture is one way in which researchers in the global south can collectively seek to redirect and reorient as an analytical framework grounded in the Global South. The postcolonial turn in social analysis is just one such effort to critically engage with social analysis from the viewpoint of Global South. Subaltern perspective emanating from India is a specific application of postcolonial theory with its own research culture tied up with Indian social reality. Its specific aim is to liberate social analysis from coloniality grounded in metropolitan interests.



## **A Brief Overview of the Evolution of Social Sciences in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is one of the earliest Asian countries to introduce social sciences after India and the Philippines (Pieris, 1976). Many social science departments in the Ceylon University College established in 1921 and the University of Ceylon established in 1942 were founded by guest professors coming from Britain, US and India. Ivor Jennings, the first professor of political science, Bryce Ryan, the first professor of Sociology and B. B. Dasgupta, the first professor of economics for instance came from, England, United States and India, respectively. Indigenization of social sciences progressed gradually with Sri Lankan social scientists progressively taking over from expatriates, and social science education that started in the English medium for a limited number of students from urban English-speaking backgrounds being opened up to Sinhala and Tamil media in order to expand social science education in the country. As of 2022, the entire university system consisting of 17 universities were involved in social science education for internal as well as external students in some universities. If we take enrollment in Sociology as an indicator, it recorded a 114 percent increase from 2396 in 1987/88 to 5121 in 2021 (Silva & Perera, 2022).

Apart from the university system, several research institutions are engaged in social science research in Sri Lanka. The relevant government agencies include the Agrarian Research and Training Institute, the Institute of Policy Studies, and the research arm of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. In addition, Marga Institute, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, the Centre for Poverty Analysis and Verité Research are among the leading non-government research agencies that have established a track record in social science research on high priority national issues.

This indicates that not only there are many higher education institutions engaged in social science teaching, but there is also a diversity of organizations engaged in social science research on a regular basis.

## **Gaps in Research Culture in Social Science Practice in Sri Lanka**

A proactive social science research culture encompassing these different institutions is yet to be evolved. This is reflected in a number of deficiencies in knowledge production in relation to social issues affecting the country.

First, there is no open discussion about pressing social issues affecting the country from a diversity of viewpoints. For instance, the current economic crisis affecting the country is approached by different analysts using a strictly neoliberal angle, a political economy perspective and dependency theory. However, there is no debate among them or an adequate questioning of these perspectives to provide a balanced analysis that can guide policy makers.

Second, the research process is by and large handled by established individual researchers rather than groups of researchers with a common understanding of the issues at hand, also ensuring continuity of research when the lead researcher retires or takes on some other responsibilities. One empirical indicator of this is that many of the publications are single authored unlike in natural sciences where the pattern is different and many of the publications are authored by many contributors. There are, however, some signs that this pattern is changing. For instance, in the current issue of *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, the number of multi-authored articles is 6 as compared to 2 single authored articles.

Third, cross cutting research networks actively engaged on vital issues like gender, environment, social inequality, urbanization, demographic trends, migration and identity politics are largely non-existent or non-active for the most part.

Fourth, there is inadequate interaction between research and policy development in Sri Lanka. In an ideal setting, research should inform policy formulation and policy dialogue should generate new ideas for research. On the contrary, policy formulation and social science research have tended to ignore each other in ways that is harmful to each other and created a hiatus between the process of economic and social development and knowledge production in the country.

Fifth, as a long-established social science journal, *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* experience many difficulties in identifying reviewers, getting manuscript reviews on time and a shortage of quality submissions from within Sri Lanka on a regular basis. This is despite the substantial expansion of social science higher education in the country as reported earlier in this editorial. While the real problems the academic community is encountering in the light of the current economic crisis may be partly responsible for this situation, this also indicates the fact that the absence of a satisfactory research culture where society as a whole is eagerly waiting for new knowledge and the application of limited social science knowledge available is largely absent in Sri Lanka at present. More importantly neither the researchers nor the policy makers consider it necessary to consult each other and develop a feedback mechanism whereby research can contribute to practice and vice-versa. This is an ultimate indicator of an absence of a proactive research culture in Social Sciences in Sri Lanka.

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**Kalinga Tudor Silva**

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Spiritual thirdspace and silent faith: reading the parallax between Buddhism and Christianity in the movie *Silence* (2016)<sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Scorsese's movie *Silence* (2016) can be (re)contextualized to state that Jesuit priests Ferreira and Rodrigues found spiritual 'Thirdspace' when their missionary work was violently suppressed during Edo Japan. To survive the banal violence, suffering and pain and counter the psychological breakdown incurred by the Buddhist inquisitor, the priests seek an alternative, spiritual assimilation and dissimilation entity that paradoxically juxtaposes with the denouncement of faith (*fumi-e*) and identifies with God's silence that preserves it. At this point, a Heideggerian 'out-of-joint' situation is experienced, reaching Christianity's true meaning: God-forsaken man is left to decide in existential freewill how to continue his faith under challenging circumstances. The 'Thirdspace' identified here differs from Catholic and Christian beliefs, practices and Buddhist doctrinal rituals and occurs when Rodrigues silently preserves his faith, like his mentor Ferreira. This silent faith becomes the indestructibly true, epistemological element. There is higher semiotic significance when Rodrigues' suppressed Christian soul symbolically returns through his wife, who places the Cross in his hands, establishing a transcendental connection that traverses both religions' limits and boundaries. Despite the two religions' 'un-meeting' spiritual contradictions, the wife's act suggests man's ability to help each other towards mutual, spiritual destinies. When Europe sees Christianity as a missionary endeavour, and its experience of Japanese cruelty culminates, a 'shift in perspective against its background' occurs that never returns gaze; the priests never look back at European origin after their 'roots were cut'. This transposition of locations that prevents a returning gaze is the parallax that re-establishes true Christian faith in both priests.

**Keywords:** Silent faith, spiritual thirdspace, loss of origin, transcendental truth.

## INTRODUCTION

*Silence* (2016) by Martin Scorsese seems not to be very popular in Japan though Japanese critics marginally talk about the new-wave film *Silence* (1971) by Masahiro Shinoda. However, Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* (Endo, 1969) is the most known masterpiece in Japan and elsewhere from which the two movies are made. The novel focuses on the *kakure kiristians* (Endo, 1969) (hidden Christians) who underwent severe hardships and religious humiliation during Edo Japan. Endo was heavily critical of religious discrimination in Japan and successfully portrayed the 'silent God' who is believed to accompany a believer. At the same time, the darkest nature of violence that Edo Buddhism (not excluding Shinto or any other traditional derivations) employed towards outsiders during its domineering exclusionist project is revealed throughout the movie. Though Scorsese's account is not an excellent one, *Silence* (1971) provides profound evidence about religious violence, dehumanization, inner paradoxes of Buddhism of Edo Era Japan, the parallax between Christianity and Edo Buddhism, pain and awareness, and most importantly, the nature of the woman who finally stands for universalism in her way. Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver and Liam Neeson contributed significantly to bringing to life the fathomless misery of the devoted Jesuit missionaries from Portugal, who volunteered to spread the message of God in Japan. However, the movie takes an unexpected twist when the two priests, Ferreira and Rodrigues, respectively mentor and pupil, reach a profound awareness that God does not hear our voice, and in

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this Heideggerian ‘thrown out’ situation, one has to make rational decisions through one’s freewill and responsibility: this is the ultimate message of Christ.

Shusaku Endo’s novel was reprinted in 2017 with a brief introduction by Scorsese. The difficulty or ‘the crisis of believing’ in describing it has attracted Scorsese to once more reflect on the same experience depicted by Endo. Especially the particular struggle that Endo, as a Christian, experiences in Japan is given global attention by Scorsese since, even today, an outsider feels the same strangeness, anxiety and difficulty of survival in Japan. ‘Endo himself had greater difficulty reconciling his Catholic faith with Japanese culture. So it is not historical research but his own experience that drew him to the stories of the Portuguese missionaries of the seventeenth century who were forced to apostatize’ (Johnston, 2004: p.263). The act of apostatizing is based on practical difficulties of experience enforced by the Buddhist Japanese, and there is a painful stage where the priests encounter the paradox of God’s voice and the reality that they happened to undergo in keeping with the voice. What suddenly occurs to Father Ferreira and Rodrigues is that the pain of their experience to keep with the voice is never heard by the Almighty, and the banality of experience psychologically forces them to alter their identity. Scorsese (2016) says that the Christian faith had to adapt repeatedly with great difficulty for it to flourish. Facing this paradox had always been an extremely painful one. However, the movie universally shows that the redemption of faith had always been possible through severe pain. Everyone hears clarity of God’s true message through a passage of pain and Endo carefully and beautifully portrays that in the novel.

Japan has still not fully recovered from its fundamental isolation and somewhat vaguely felt an unwelcoming attitude triggered by this isolation towards outsiders that is visible in present-day Japanese. Nish (2009b), in his chapter titled ‘The uncertainties of isolation: Japan between the wars’ (Bates *et al.*, 2009) explains that this isolation was initially a preferred political choice adopted by the rulers of Edo-era Japan, whose concept was that there was

“no reason to fear isolation because she [Japan] had been for over two centuries between the sixteen-thirties and 1853 a sealed country (*sakoku*) and had, despite her isolation, made abundant progress during that period. But recent scholarship suggests that it is a historical misconception to speak of this period as one of ‘isolation’”. (Nish in Bates *et al.*, 2009, p.252)

Following the economic progress Japan has shown after its eventual exit from isolation, marked by its signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, despite the lack of enthusiasm at the time to do so by Japan’s army and other pillars of power in the country (Best in Bates *et al.*, 2009), Japan has risen as a highly developed Asiatic nation. Unsurprisingly, even in modern times, there still remains a hint of the isolation within which its people relate to other nations around the world. In short, the fact that Japan can stand alone proves that such isolationism should not be feared (Bates *et al.*, 2009). However, it is possible to state that military and emperor rule in Japan, with its vested authoritarian rule, combined with the country’s continued lack of fear of isolation, has had problems in the manner in which the country has handled international relations (Nish, 2009b).

One should also not forget Japan’s tendency in the years leading to the end of World War-II (WWII) to conquer Southeast Asia with its intention of expanding its empire; for instance, its invasion and occupation of Malaya (Malaysia) and Singapore (Beng-Lan, 2011a), which exemplify the nation’s “dominant source of intellectual influence in the region...the various colonial powers” (Beng-Lan, 2011b: p.21) and its mission as executing a colonizing project.

The movie *Silence* (2016) is politico-culturally significant today because it still pronounces the incapacity of the Japanese mind to open itself to the contingencies that can come with outsiders. Their protectionism, nationalism and psychological fear can be understood by tracing back to some of the most traumatic historical events that occurred during World War II, and they deserve great respect for their devotion towards disarmament

and global pacification (Nish, 2009b); Bates *et al.*, 2009). They have learnt much from their history, which, as Nishitani (1982) metaphorically believes, is like a river that ceaselessly flows through the present.

Yet, according to Nish's (2009a) study on Japan's isolation, it still seems that the nation's present, with its historical preference for enclosure and thriving prosperity within boundaries, continues to resist being (re)shaped by fearlessly welcoming outsiders as if the nation prefers the way it has been in the past. In this sense, the postcolonial cultural 'melting pot' that is quite a real and ordinary experience for those in nations like India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, or, most importantly, Singapore in modern times is almost a political deadlock for Japan (Hammond & Hein, 1992), since present-day issues that connect Japan "to the outside world- issues such as multiculturalism or foreign labourers or Japan's international contribution to global security – hark back to the same mammoth and unresolved question of national identity, creating a political deadlock in contemporary Japan" (Hammond & Hein, 1992: p.147).

The nation's inability to accept change or make way for the change that necessity instigates in the aftermath of WWII is ironically against the preaching of the inevitable 'impermanence of all matter' or 'change', one of the most fundamental principles of Buddhism. The dominant religion of Edo-era Japan should have emphasized to its subjects that even Japanese dominance is also subject to change. This paper examines the Parallax between Edo Buddhism and Christianity in the Movie *Silence* (2016).

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Seitz (2016) explains that Scorsese's movie *Silence* (2016) "is a monumental work, and a punishing one. It puts you through hell with no promise of enlightenment, only a set of questions and propositions, sensations and experiences" (Seitz, 2016: p.1). The fact that he indicates that the movie leaves the viewer with no resolution but a mere set of unresolved feelings, emotions and questions is true insofar as the doctrines of Buddhism of the Edo Era in Japan and Christianity are severely kept on either side.

Yet, Seitz's (2016) proposition, in a way, assures that such destabilization of the boundaries of religious understanding is fundamentally possible; that there could be hope for an alternate discourse. If at all this is true, the evidence for this is that at the end of the movie, not only does Rodriguez, as a new apostatized priest has a Japanese wife, but is also, finally, cremated at the end of his natural life-span in Japan, with his wife in a transcendental moment of realization, secretly placing an image of Christ in the dead man's palm, amidst the overseeing guards, thereby leaving the viewer with a hitherto unforeseen sense of resolution.

As Harris (2017) claims, *Silence* (2016) "refers to God's silence while Rodrigues bears witness to all sorts of anguish and human suffering throughout the film" (Harris, 2017: p.1). He further reiterates that the movie also is a reflection of Director Scorsese's atheist stance as "a self-avowed "lapsed Catholic," [who] understands both the folly and the courage of unshakeable faith (Harris, 2017: p.1). Thus through *Silence* (2016), the audience is pulled away from mindlessly following the fundamental teachings of both religions to suggest that faith "is a personal journey" (Harris, 2017: p.1)

Coupled with the Director's position is the equally eccentric stance of Shusaku Endo (1969), author of the novel *Silence* (Endo, 1969), from which Scorsese (2016) draws inspiration and on which the movie *Silence* (2016) is made. Endo (1969) is described as "the Japanese Graham Greene [which] means that he is a Catholic novelist, that his books are problematic and controversial, that his writing is deeply psychological, that he depicts the anguish of faith and the mercy of God" (Translator's (Johnston's) Preface in Endo, 1969). Johnston (Endo, 1969) believes that Endo (1969) is "the first Catholic to put it forward with such force and to draw the clear-cut conclusion that Christianity must adapt itself radically if it is to take root in the 'swamp' of Japan" (Endo, 1969: p.ii). The notion of the 'swamp' as a description of Japan recurs in both the novel and the movie wherein the Japanese Inoue states that, " 'Father, you were not defeated by me,' says the victorious Inoue. 'You were defeated

by this swamp of Japan.’ It is precisely the swamp of Japan that cannot absorb the type of Christianity that has been propagated in these islands” (Endo, 1969: p.vi).

Not only does this refer to Endo’s (1969) preoccupation, since his early days of writing, with the conflict between the East and West (Endo, 1969), but also the fact that “Japan is a swamp because it sucks up all sorts of ideologies, transforming them into itself and distorting them in the process. It is the spider’s web that destroys the butterfly, leaving only the ugly skeleton” (Endo, 1969: p.vii). Johnston in Endo (1969) also terms the “mud swamp Japanese” (Endo, 1969: p.vii), were Buddhist and nihilistic to the extent that they had not allowed themselves to be taken into the depths of being the Christianity that was presented to them, and that had this Christianity been “less incorrigibly Western, things might have been different” (Endo, 1969: p.vii). Hence, not only does *Silence* (Endo, 1969; Scorsese, 2016) depict the immaculate desire for resistance to change (ironically an element that all Buddhists are fundamentally taught to believe and accept), but also stands testimony to the satirically absolute failure of 17<sup>th</sup> century Japanese to live up the notion of being called Buddhists.

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## THEORETICAL PREMISE

### The parallax view

One of the fundamental understandings required for the present review of *Silence* (2016) is how the seemingly incompatible and polar opposite religions of Edo Era Buddhism and Christianity can be merged in the light of a parallax view. The standard definition of parallax is the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply “subjective” since the same object which exists “out there” is seen from two different stances or points of view (Žižek, 2006c: p.17).

In other words, a parallax arises out of the situation in which a subject and object are mediated so that an epistemological shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an ontological shift in the object itself. Once this occurs, the subject’s gaze, which in the Lacanian (Žižek, 2006c) sense is “always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself” (Žižek, 2006c: p.17), and which is “more the object than the object itself” (Žižek, 2006c: p.17) (the ‘blind spot’) returns the subject’s gaze in a moment of realization that generates a transcendental shift of understanding that affects both the domain of the subject and its object. This parallax view ultimately brings forth a ‘meeting point’ of understanding that juxtaposes the boundaries of two seemingly unparalleled domains. Since the movie *Silence* (2016) is a story of how two distinctively different faiths are in conflict with each other and ultimately posit some resolution at the end (possibly in the form of Rodrigues’ Japanese wife), it is an ideal theoretical premise for a review of the movie *Silence* (2016).

### ‘Thirdspace’ (Soja, 1996)

Edward Soja’s (1996) ‘Thirdspace’ is a radically inclusive concept that denies enacting a higher synthesis over the other. In contrast, ‘Thirdspace’ (Soja, 1996) theory argues to transcend and constantly expand to include an–Other. In the process, it contests and re-negotiates beyond dualisms. In doing so, the histories constituting the dualisms are displaced and new structures of authority and initiatives are set up (Soja, 1996). In light of the present review of *Silence* (2016), Soja’s (1996) ‘Thirdspace’ is adapted as a ‘spiritual Thirdspace’ where a valuable standpoint is created to understand the transcendental element that originates as a result of the parallax view of the polarities of Edo Buddhism and Christianity.

### Foundations of Buddhism and Christianity

One of the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Christianity, relevant to the present review of the movie *Silence* (2016), is that in Christianity, the root of faith is in a creator God. In contrast, the Buddha “is

against accepting anyone or anything as an authority” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.2) except the person or subject him/herself. In this sense, a sense of ‘inward exploration’ pertains to Buddhism, which exemplifies “anti-authoritarian systems of thinking” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.2). The second most significant identification is that the “logic of salvation” (Smart, 1993: p.13) by the two central figures of Jesus and the Buddha differs. As Smart (1993) explains

The Buddha’s similes were instructional in purpose, and his teachings were built on a highly analytic scaffolding [...] Jesus saved humanity through his deeds and death - he was a sacrifice which restored the breach between human beings and the Divine, and the way of the Cross, however unlooked for, was nevertheless the path that the salvific plan of action took. The Buddha saves through his teaching above all (Smart, 1993: p.13).

In this sense, the two religions differ in their conception of the world and the universe, for in Buddhism there were two conceptions of the world; the external objective world and the other of the ‘personal world’ (Dharmasiri, 1998). The Buddha’s “understanding of the objective world took place in the context of the universe. Universe was understood in terms of a vast cosmic space” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.5). In contrast, in the faith of Christianity, “there is a God who has created all things and who himself gives his creation meaning. Further, we can know him” (Boice, 1986: p.7). This ‘higher order’ description of the formation of the universe and adherence to the ‘word of God’, lies in stark contrast to the Buddha’s teachings, where in particular he said, “his own teachings themselves should be subjected to careful scrutiny before acceptance” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.2).

The Buddha further maintained that “one must neither accept nor reject an idea because of one’s likes or dislikes, without proper investigation. Until the idea is verified, one must temporarily safeguard it (*saccānurakkhanā*), because what one is going to reject might turn out, after all, to be true” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.3). In contrast, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Boice, 1986: p.7). Fundamentally then, there is an ‘un-meeting’ of the premise, as Buddhism’s and Christianity’s conception of what constitutes knowledge and the way to wisdom are on either end of the spectrum.

The above theoretical premises are important in reviewing the movie *Silence* (2016), since the movie is about whether Christianity can be rooted in an Edo Buddhist land, which had an authoritarian rule in the Edo era, and what happens when it is attempted to be done. The essence of ritual practice in the theistic religions such as Christianity, where worship, i.e. “things such as hymns, prayers and adoration” (Smart, 1993: p.15) were some of the unacclimatized elements that were introduced into Japan’s Edo Era Buddhist ground, resulted in extreme and banal violence and resistance, since the foundations of the latter, in the strictest sense of Edo Buddhism, did not talk of the worship of Buddha in the Theravadin context. However, the offerings of flowers and such were considered meritorious acts that would bring about “the possibility of a better time in lives to come” (Smart, 1993: p.15).

Another ideological difference between Buddhism and Christianity that would pertain to a better understanding of the movie *Silence* (2016) is the absence of the ‘soul’ as the very essence of Buddhism, an “emptiness at the heart of the individual” (Smart, 1993: p.17), which heavily intercepts with the main emphasis in the Christian tradition with its “the sacramental participation of the faithful in the life of Christ, through the Eucharist” (Smart, 1993: p.15). This ‘soulful’ worship fundamentally brings about the movie’s eccentric violence against the Jesuit priests and the converts who attempted to plant Christianity on Japanese soil.

Although such polar-opposite ideological doctrine and its clash are seemingly at the base of the plot of the movie *Silence* (2016), as the story unfolds, there is a sense of possible merging that is suggested even after much bloodshed and chaos, which finally proposes a ‘peaceful exit’ from the polemics and polarities that enfold in the movie.

### **The Kyoto School of Thought and Nishida Kitaro (1991)**

The Kyoto School, which constituted of a group of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese thinkers, developed original philosophies and thoughts, led by its founder Nishida Kitaro (1990), by creatively drawing upon the intellectual and spiritual traditions of East Asia, particularly Buddhism, as well as on the methods and content of Western Philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). The exercise dawned out of the need for Japan to consider Western academic fields of inquiry, after being in national isolation for more than two centuries. Kitaro (1990) was the first prominent modern Japanese thinker who succeeded in traversing from the learning of the West and constructed his original system of thought, which resulted in the publication of his seminal work *An Inquiry into the Good* (Kitaro, 1990).

Following Kitaro's (1990) path-breaking work, the fundamental thought of the Kyoto school thinkers is that the foundations of wisdom lie not in abstract intellectual theory, but in pure, whole experience, which is the product of one's conscious reality (Drengson, 1993). Kitaro's (1990) premise is that when there is unity of consciousness and the character of pure experience, a system of wholeness manifests as a unifying reality (Kitaro, 1991). Another important demarcation is the notion of 'absolute nothingness' (Kitaro, 1990; Hapugoda & Rathnayake, 2021) as a matter of transcendental subjectivity of a being who succeeds in going beyond "the opposition between being and non-being" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019: p.1). Kitaro's perceptions of the potential possibilities of the transcendental are significant in the analysis of *Silence* (2016).

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## **METHODOLOGY**

In the scope of this study, the semiotic evidence in the movie *Silence* (2016) will be interpreted using critical hermeneutics and Žižekian tools (the parallax, the gaze- explained in the theoretical premise above) to investigate the parallax interplay between Christianity and Buddhism in Edo Japan. The use of parallax is an alternative perspective that can effectively be used to understand the transpositions of phenomena, i.e., Buddhism and Christianity in modern Japan, in which the polarities and differences make a transverse moment where antinomies finally make each other whole (Karatani, 2003). Hence, this study deviates from the usual Marxist dialectical position of one negating the other and generates something new out of that negation. Through given semiotic evidence, the study explores how Edo Buddhism justified banal violence against an alien religion, despite its original teaching of great compassion. It also shows how this violence becomes 'divine' when the priests understand that awareness is only possible when they deny the ritualistic belief in Christianity. Similarly, through cinematic evidence, the study also interprets, how Christianity becomes stronger and more universal through such violence. Hence, comparisons and contrasts across phenomena are integral to the analysis.

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **Man's action in God's absence**

*Silence* (2016), the motion picture by Martin Scorsese, triggers certain philosophical standpoints, especially the teachings of Martin Heidegger from which the Kyoto School of Philosophy learnt their fundamentals. The movie reminds us of the popular Heideggerian statement that God no longer looks at us (Heidegger in Smith, 2011) and, therefore, man is fully free in this organic world. Following Heideggerian (Smith, 2011) thought, it is possible to state that the freedom from that celestial gaze, the condition that no superior authority is looking at us, can be the ultimate freedom that man can think of. In other words, there is no master who supervises our actions and man is free from the bondage of gaze. If God is forever silent, as was proved when Christ was on the cross, then it is up to man to decide what he must do in this organic reality in the absence of His voice. When Christ painfully uttered, "Father why did you forsake me?" in his last moment, he exemplified that there is nobody divine willing to intervene in this organic darkness that man encounters. Here, Christ proved that man is fully responsible for his action - the ultimate freedom of all - is his freewill. According to his conscience, man must decide what is right

and wrong and act accordingly. The film *Silence* (2016) gives us an opportunity to rethink this freewill and freedom of choice that has been granted to us by the highest sacrifice of a man - the pain of Christ.

After years of struggle and arguing with his conscience, and when God is dead silent, Father Ferreira decides to 'obey' the brutal Japanese Buddhist order and 'step on' the portrait of Jesus (*fumi-e*) to save his followers. He takes that decision in the absence of God's mediation. It seems God speaks in silence and man must be profound enough to listen to that silence and understand what must be done in a disaster. However, the simple understanding that Scorsese mentions in his introduction needs revision. He says that "God's love is more mysterious" (Scorsese, 2016) and has left much more for us to subtly understand through a passage of pain. It seems here that it is not that God's message is mysterious, but the human self is too egoistic and self-centred that one is too negligent to pay attention to the moment of dissolution of one's ego that enlightens the smallness and finitude of human existence. The obedience that Ferreira first follows is such a moment when he realizes that nature (the distorted image of God in Japan) is bigger than the missionary message. Ferreira points towards the rising sun and states that the Japanese only understand "the distorted image of God" (Scorsese, 2016) and nothing else. And whatever sacrifice that "these Japanese" (Ferreira in Scorsese, 2016) make is not for God but for the image of God (that is distorted). They die "for you Rodrigues" (Ferreira in Scorsese, 2016) means at this moment that in its deepest sense, they do not believe in any true origin (a beginning of a Messenger) but are in a present reflection of such image (that is distorted), represented by Ferreira or Rodrigues.

### The local Japanese Buddhist model in Edo-Era

The Mahayana version of Buddhism in Japan has the same 'distortion' as the God's 'distorted' image in Japan in *Silence* (Scorsese, 2016). What was practiced then in Japan is not at all taught in the original teachings by Buddha, for instance how one of the Japanese unifying trio, Hideyoshi, who had a strict hand against 'foreign' intrusions in the country in the late Sengoku period, at one point in a fit of anger ordered the immediate execution of a group of 26 Japanese and European Jesuit missionaries. The fateful 26 were crucified in a place close to present-day Nagasaki station (Endo, 1969: p.iii). The element of Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*) is not seen in the brutal violence that was executed by the so called Buddhists in the then Edo era. Cultivation of great compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*muditha*) and equanimity (*upekkha*) is essential for a Buddhist, irrespective of the tradition. Even in the Mahayana tradition, both *karuna* and *pragna* (wisdom) are given priority in Buddhist existence. But it observed that the Japanese in *Silence* (Scorsese, 2016) were violating the true message of Buddha and could 'peacefully wait' till the Christians painfully bled to death; there is no sense of remorse for the pain inflicted on the Christians. As we see in *Silence* (Scorsese, 2016), there is no guilt or human conscience in what Inoue and his team were doing for the sake of doing it, and they are very much like Nazi officers who read *Bhagavath Geetha* at night, while they tortured Jews in gas chambers during the day. According to Žižek (2006b), Hollywood propagated the myth that "the torturers can retain their human dignity if the cause is right, is a profound lie" (Žižek, 2006b) and the Buddhist torturers who inflicted those barbaric crimes in the name of Buddhism of the Edo Era (if preserving Buddhism is the cause) cannot also be apologized. They knew what they were doing was wrong, but they performed those crimes by completely distancing themselves from the acts (maintaining a cynical distance) using a nationalistic ideology. It is not an illusion but a distorted content of social representation (Johnston, 2004). Hence, all the distortions that *Silence* (2016) refers to in Japan are perverted content of representation that preserves some degree of nationalistic 'jouissance'<sup>1</sup>.

Japan historically adopted a local model of a 'pure' society during the Edo era by condemning Christians and treating them as second-class citizens. This example has continued even to today's modern society (a fantasy adapted by Lee Kuan Yew, who appropriated it to Singapore). On the one hand and to a far greater extent, it is possible to state that Japanese society is free from the 'evil content of modernity'; for example, cigarettes without nicotine, beer without alcohol or butter without fat, but is ironically not free from the "banality of evil" (Arendt in Allen, 1979: p.20), which is typical of modernity, where "cruelty has gone passionless, violence has become mechanized [and] suffering has become impersonal and dehumanized" (Arendt in Allen, 1979: p.20). But true

modernity is about accepting even the evil content, much like loving someone with his/her weakness. In this manner, one can develop a sense of inclusiveness even though an obvious evil accompanies a stranger. But the Japanese at that time were not courageous enough to accept the strangeness of its organic evil (metaphorically nicotine with the cigarette). But, interestingly, the Japanese Inoue summons Rodrigues and informs him that all these outsiders must be detached from their original roots to take new initiatives in this swamp of Japan. "Their roots must be cut" (*Silence*, 2016), the Inoue advocates, and to do so, a horrific de-humanization process takes place against the hidden Christians in Japan. Finally, they surrender against the face of violence, yet all show that their faith remains with them till their last breath, in a hidden manner.

### **The parallax between Buddhism and Christianity**

The real parallax that becomes visible between Christianity and Edo Buddhism in *Silence* (2016) is the moment when Buddhism denies the existence of a big Other, an Almighty God who can help man in adversity. On the other hand, Buddhism believes in a human who has the potential within him/herself to become more than him/herself (more than God) if s/he strives to be so. Though paradoxical, both priests understand this phenomenon when they face suffering as Christ did. But the violence they face differs from that of Christ, since the priests do not physically suffer but are exposed to the unbearable reality that their followers are forced to undergo: brutal suffering unless the priests publicly renounce their faith. The denial of faith is essentially connected with the identity that they have developed when they became priests. Faith is part of their self or identity that they project to their followers as 'good priests' who are faithful to their belief or rather do not betray their faith. Hence, this identity formation as 'good priests' demands an amount of identification with what they believe in. However, the Japanese inquisitor demands the renunciation of this identification with the faith or executes a harsh method to "cut the roots" (*Silence*, 2016) of their faith. 'Roots' here mean the origin of their identity formation process in which they became faithful priests. Until they renounce their faith and step on a *fumi-e* they do not realize the fact that they are also expected to perform the same act that Jesus did if they ever want to save the Other. This self-denial needed great courage and, in doing so, finally freed them from their own identity.

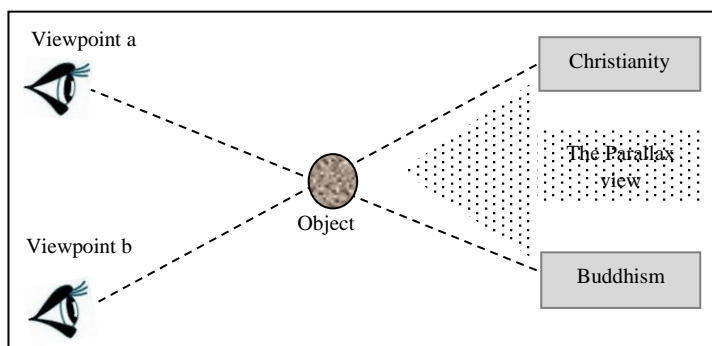
Žižek (2007) mentions that man in the present cynical era can engage in any banal act because God is truly ignorant. He says, "we are all ready to indulge in utter skepticism, cynical distance, exploitation of others "without any illusions," violations of all ethical constraints, extreme sexual practices, etc." (Žižek, 2007) because we are protected by the silent awareness that the big Other is ignorant about it. The Japanese Buddhists also seemed to have a silent awareness that the God whom these Christians pray for is an impotent one - one who is deeply silent about the sufferings of his own creations, or He can also be someone who derives pervert pleasure from the sufferings of his faithful followers. Hence, Father Ferreira decides to covert his whole act in light of what Jesus did to save his followers. He gives up on the big Other and starts believing in the symbolic order established by Jesus. Within the mutation of God and before the fathomless sufferings of his subjects, Ferreira invokes his consciousness (awareness) rather than believing in the belief that some miracle would happen. He frees himself from the ritualistic element of worshipping and pleading with God to save others; he becomes Christ, an imitation of Christ. Father Ferreira realizes that the other can be saved only through his suffering (both mental and physical torture). Moreover, as far as Japanese cruelty is concerned, there was no other way. The problem lies in his consciousness, the moral and ethical doubt as to whether such denial is acceptable, which is addressed by a hallucinatory emergence of Jesus when he is about to take the action of *fumi-e*.

Žižek (2008) often uses the term 'divine violence' (2008) to demarcate the difference between progressive changes in humanity and the everlasting inertia in existence. In his book *On Practice and Contradiction* (Žižek, 2017) Žižek, also refers to Asia and her centuries-old melancholia towards human progress. The violence found in *Silence* (2016) cannot be termed as violence towards progression and change but rather violence that keeps existing Japanese feudalism intact to resist deeper changes. One can also argue that this violence is a nationalistic struggle against European colonialism. However, when it comes to the existing feudal structure and life conditions of ordinary masses, the narrow nationalistic violence, which aims at anti-universalistic pre-modern politics, can

be articulated as mere 'feminine' or 'weak' resistance to what is more plausibly the acceptable and democratic way of the future: universality. However, even from a textbook Buddhist point of view, it is not acceptable that the priests in *Silence* (2016) (or anyone) have to undergo this amount of banal violence to reach awareness. The Buddha has never advocated violence to change or covert a faith. Such change will not be sustainable. Buddhism is a religion of non-violence and compassion. A man should reach self-awareness through his means, by practice.

### The parallax realized through woman

In the movie, eventually, it is Rodrigues' Japanese wife who attains the parallax between Edo Buddhism and Christianity. She steps out of her comfort zone into Rodrigues' awareness, and transcends the boundaries of perception between the two religions in her stone-pillar-like silence. Symbolically, this woman confirms the possibility of parallax theory, which claims an "apparent difference in the position or direction of an object caused when the observer's position is changed" (Thompson, 1993: p.645). Passed from Father Ferreira to Rodrigues' hands as a wife, this Japanese woman moves into a silence that is so profound in the movie in contrast to all others involved in the 'un-meeting' of the two religions and suffers in the conflict of their atrocities. She is the one who silently penetrates the bloodshed through her understanding and love and arrives at a 'parallax view' that makes us see things neither from a subjective viewpoint nor from the viewpoint of others, but in the face of reality that is exposed through difference (Karatani, 2003; Žižek, 2006c).



**Figure 1:** The parallax between Buddhism and Christianity in the movie *Silence* (2016)  
Source: Authors

Unlike Rodrigues and other *kakure kiristians* (*Silence*, 2016), her emotions are not shown in the movie. Yet, her actions reach a higher order of things. For instance, when she secretly places the cross in Rodrigues' hands before cremation, she meets and transcends his faith in silence. In this silence, she arrives at a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) parallax of the Christian her husband believed in. Ultimately, the contradiction is understood beyond dialectic reason and reaches a transcendental experience, that of a possible Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) in which the 'antinomies of tolerant reason' (Žižek, 2006a) are validated. In the face of this irreducible antinomy, an eternal harmony between Edo Buddhism and Christianity emerges a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996), which re-negotiates between the dualisms. Symbolically, it is the woman, then, who carries the transcendental phenomenon in a silent faith of the Other, which becomes the true epistemological element that Buddhism or any other religion cannot kill.

In this sense, the woman transcends the message of deeper universalism and love that can glue the whole civilization together despite the ideological divisions that man has made. In her hidden existence and eternal silence under contemporary power politics, she displays her inner potential to be universal without being hysterically outspoken about her desire or otherness. Her love, compassionate understanding and acceptance of the difference in her alien husband deconstruct the existing masculine polarization between Japanese politics and Christian missionary inflow into the 'swamp' (Figure 01). Though nothing grows in the swamp, she is the one who plants the seeds of true love, a matter that both religions were unable to do. The two polars are dissolved within her Buddhist compassionateness, in which Christian love also resides. Hence, her silent love represents



the Buddhist middle path that dissolves both egos i.e., the Christian missionary civilizing project and the Japanese resistance to preserve their religion. In this sense, silence deconstructs Jesus' ego-ideal Christian metaphor, whose true message was to 'step on me' and the Buddhist violence that wanted to keep the pure land ideal by excluding Otherness.

### Understanding the parallax

As we know, after the Meiji Restorations, the Japanese allowed Western values to flourish in their land and embraced the Western way of life. After so much historical struggle they have allowed Western otherness to enter the Japanese geography and its life-world. They have further advanced Western science and technology to reach higher living standards: if we borrow a popular statement from Mao Tse-Tung, something that is more Western than Western (Žižek, 2007). In this context, to reach a higher existential state of mind and a pure consciousness (Kitaro, 1990), it is observed that both Japanese tradition and alien values started co-existing simultaneously in Japan. This means that the Japanese understood the Buddhist theory of dependent origination, that things exist not in a dialectical form but in a mutually depending and arising form. This is the theoretical basis for the parallax technique in which, in the context of the movie, Christianity and Buddhism practised in Edo Era Japan have met in a transverse moment to enrich each other and live together. In this sense, Edo Buddhism provides an existential space for the alienated Japanese mind that grows in an advanced industrial context, while Christian love and otherness provide a broader form of coexistence for the Japanese existential mind that prefers existential isolationism. The tolerant meeting point of these great traditions inspires the whole world to understand the possibility of deeper realisation, consciousness and coexistence between the East and the West.

The situational and swamp-like materialistic conditions of the Japanese land and its taught Buddhist ideology that compels its subjects to seek enlightenment from within not only negate/neglect considerations of the other and any form of other-inclusiveness but also deny Inoue san, the Inquisitor and his rule(rs) the infamous "luxury of the Sartrean blink" (Jameson, 1986: p.85), which offers the placeless individuality that the West (Jesuit priests) bring into Edo-era Japan. As Nishitani (1982) explains, what lies crucial at the heart of the man who belongs to Christian philosophy is that man remains lord-like in relation to the objects he perceives around him. In other words, his mind, soul and consciousness look 'out' at everything else as if they were a central citadel or viewpoint. Thus, Nishitani (1982) further argues, the Christian man (in this case, priests Ferreira and Rodrigues) can only observe a Cartesian reality of the world, where there can only exist reality as a division of immaterial subjective consciousness, or at the other end, material visible objectivity (Nishitani, 1982). This is the birth of Western dichotomy, which can only explicate the life-world it sees always as either A or B, and A cannot be B. This is why we see priests Ferreira and Rodrigues so stubborn in their need their Christian selves in the other Japanese.

Against this, Nishitani (1982) further argues lies the biological-organic model of conceiving the universe as of interdependent origin a matter in which part upon part and its internal relations constitute what is known as the universe or the whole. In this sense, the subjects from the West (priests Ferreira and Rodrigues) fail to realize the organism of Buddhism's great nothingness from which all individual beings flow in, in their diverse forms and return to upon dissolution. It is the most unlikely meeting of both these influxes that would be a solution to the crises in the movie. Furthermore, on the way to identify a parallax view and move into what is known as a way to 'higher unity' (Karatani, 1993), one needs to recapture the higher goal in the form of unitary foundation or the higher 'Good' (Karatani, 1993), which does not entirely do away with the Western way of logical thinking and assertion, but rather engages subjectively in a state of 'pure consciousness' that cannot be effaced.

When Buddhism offers enlightenment through an introverted journey to oneself, one has to forget the otherness which can rise as an obstacle to the attainment of Nirvana. That is why Buddha considered his son Rahula a "fetter" (Britannica.com, 2021), which could, in layman's language, be articulated as a chain or manacle that restrains. In short, Rahula is a 'bond' and thus an obstacle. However, once Buddha attained the highest stage of enlightenment, Nirvana, he too wanted to share that awareness with the other; even an enlightened soul is not

fully free from that otherness which suffers. The Jesuit priests in *Silence* (2016) believe in the ordinary Japanese otherness that suffers in this feudalistic land of oppression and tries very hard to 'save' them from the physical suffering in the objective world. They fail before a very domineering and oppressive feudal government. However, through that oppression and de-humanisation, the priests, too, realise that they can become Jesus-like and eliminate their deep Christian identity, the ego, by stepping on the image of Christ. This means 'the obstacle' to their salvation (realisation) was the over-identification in Jesus himself. Hence, ego and otherness always take turns in this movie and transpose the mirror through which personal narcissism is constructed and then deconstructed. The image of Christ constructs the ego of the priests, and by stepping on the image (*fumi-e*) they realize its limits and traverse it.

Rodrigues' Japanese wife silently takes a middle path of nothingness, realizes the futility of masculine violence towards exclusion and acknowledges the secret existence of Christian-ness in the Japanese mind. Similarly, there is a Buddhistness in every Christian heart. That is the true parallax in Japan and elsewhere, where two profound values are meaningfully combined. Hence, through this catastrophic historical event, Japan realized the need to accept the otherness in each other; the parallax in the land of nothingness emerged from within her Buddhist-dependent origination.

In present-day Japan, western science and technology have enhanced Japanese material life, while the Zen way of life and Shino have improved their existential life. In the meantime, Japanese Zen teachings, have penetrated the Western world and resided there strongly. However, the Japanese life-world is a completely different one as far as modern Marxist views are concerned since tradition too alternatively co-existed in its modern life without generating a clean break from one historical stage to another. Even for today's Japanese life, there should be a parallax view rather than a dialectical standpoint to understand the complexities in their life that have been generated due to the clash of two value systems functioning at the same time, each consisting of independent legitimacies. The deeper polarities in two great traditions are absorbed into a fathomless Japanese silence in which a new 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) has been generated through the loss of ego and through the destruction of old mirrors.

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## CONCLUSION

The movie *Silence* (2016) provides evidence about the historical struggle of the Japanese Buddhist and incoming Christian missionaries in which a new modern 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) has been generated in modern Japan. A parallax view would be more suitable to detect this new space than the popular dialectical method. The contingent meeting of two polarities has sought a new consciousness, where a profound exchange of ethico-political values has constructed a new form of communism<sup>2</sup> in Japan. Both polarities have deconstructed their hard kernels to meet each other, creating a space of tolerant antimonies. Hence, Buddhism and Christianity be used as critiques against each other and produce a new consciousness for modern-day humanity. In this sense, Japan has become an example which proves that an eternal harmony between Buddhism of the Edo Era in Japan and Christianity is possible. However, the movie *Silence* (2016) shows the historical difficulties that such a meeting encounters until they find a tolerant 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) in which both systems do not lose their historical essence. However both histories will never be the same after this historical encounter.

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## END NOTES

1. 'Jouissance' is "enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle" (Lacan, 2006, p. 761) and can be defined as an excessive quantity of excitation which the pleasure principle attempts to prevent" (Evans, 1996, p. 150). The relationship between jouissance and the pleasure principle is such that "pleasure is the safeguard of a state of homeostasis and constancy which jouissance constantly threatens to disrupt and traumatize" (Evans, 1996,

p. 150). A subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his 'enjoyment' and to go beyond the pleasure principle.

2. The reason why the authors believe it is a 'new form of communism' is because the parallax point reached at the end of *Silence* (2016) is suggestive that there is a possible shift from the authoritative Japanese Inoue rule and its severe hand of power, which is so used to taking into its hands 'God-like' power, denying any possible people's choice, to a theory or system of social organization in which the Japanese community has some ownership to the choices of individual interest, be it religion or any other matter. In short, the 'tolerance' of both polarities has transferred a vested amount of power to the Japanese individual.

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Electronic human resource management (e-HRM) adoption; a systematic literature review

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**Abstract:** e-HRM is a web-based technology that directly contributes to organisational effectiveness and supports different organisational functions. Even though the researchers have investigated different aspects of e-HRM adoption and reviews of them available, there are gaps in the current knowledge relating to the subject. Thus, the main objectives of this study were to assess (1) the current knowledge and (2) the areas where empirical research is lacking in e-HRM adoption. The systematic literature review methodology was followed to address these objectives. Twenty articles published from 2010 to 2021 were included in the review from Scopus. The article selection criteria, materials and methods, analysis, and findings' reporting structure were followed based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The findings categorised e-HRM research into six main themes. They are (1) factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption/usage, (2) e-HRM value creation, (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation. These themes represent two research areas: the factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoptions. Gaps in e-HRM research continue to exist in the empirical research environment. Accordingly, our findings have implications for improving e-HRM application and future research.

**Keywords:** Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM), e-HRM adoption, digitisation of HRM.

## INTRODUCTION

The digitalisation of business has helped many HRM functions be digitalised (Ziebell, Albors-Garrigos, Schultz *et al.*, 2019). Such a digitalisation is known as Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM). It is defined as using information technology to interconnect and support at least two individuals or groups in HRM activities (Strohmeier, 2007). Thus, e-HRM allows employees to access e-HRM systems and perform their HRM tasks independently and efficiently.

The e-HRM services evolve through innovative technologies (Ziebell, Albors-Garrigos, Schultz, *et al.*, 2019). For example, social media is used for recruiting and selection (Bersin, 2017). It helps with job postings, skill tests, profile checks (Bersin, 2019), and job seeker tracking (Waddill, 2018). Social media also help internal communications, team collaboration, training, learning, and employee development (Waddill, 2018). Employee tracking for a variety of purposes, such as predicting employee behaviours and satisfaction levels, succession planning, employee engagement patterns, learning and development levels, health, safety, and well-being levels, employee performance and evaluations, and career path modelling, are possible with big data and data analytics technologies (Waddill, 2018). Cloud-based technologies provide better automation for almost all HRM processes through human capital software solutions. Employee tracking, performance management, health, safety, well-being, and job design are all aided by the Internet of Things (IoT) (Aronica, 2013; Waddill-Goad, 2016). Mobile technologies support all these social media, big data, data analytics, cloud computing, and the IoT. As a result, industry experts and analysts believe that e-HRM has become a more strategic approach to organisations (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019) as it can increase efficiency, improve employee experience (Karan, 2020) and process quality (Lengnick-Hall & Moritz, 2003), and makes HRM practices more accessible than before (Bersin, 2017; Wright & Ulrich, 2017).

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Thus, the e-HRM encourages the stakeholders to adopt such technologies. Researchers have empirically investigated factors for the adoption of e-HRM. For example, user attitudes (Chandradasa & Priyashantha, 2021a, 2021b; Masum *et al.*, 2015), organisation support (Masum *et al.*, 2015; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2019), technology infrastructure (Chandradasa & Priyashantha, 2021b; Masum *et al.*, 2015; Strohmeier & Kabst, 2012), employee skill (Dilu *et al.*, 2017) and perceived usefulness (Wahyudi & Park, 2014) are some of them. Knowing such different factors may help practitioners and policymakers to take action in promoting e-HRM adoption to grasp the full advantages of e-HRM. For that, the availability of a synthesis of all the factors empirically investigated on e-HRM would be a great advantage for them. Researchers have used the systematic literature review methodology to synthesise the current knowledge on a particular subject (Priyashantha, A. De Alwis & Welmilla, 2022; Priyashantha & Dilhani, 2022; Andrić, Priyashantha & De Alwis, 2023; Priyashantha, De Alwis & Welmilla, 2023a; Priyashantha, De Alwis & Welmilla, 2023b; Priyashantha, Dahanayake & Maduwanthi, 2023). Thus, we found few studies synthesising the e-HRM adoption data. One included four decades of e-HRM adoption and consequences based on research using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method data up to 2017 (Bondarouk *et al.*, 2017). Another reviewed 40 e-HRM research published from 1999 to 2011 and found that strategic HRM predicts e-HRM outcomes (Marler & Fisher, 2013). Besides, the latest review studies covered disruptive HRM technologies (Priyashantha, A. C. De Alwis & Welmilla, 2022; Priyashantha, 2023), cloud-based e-HRM (Ziebell, Albors-Garrigos, Schoeneberg, *et al.*, 2019), e-HRM adoption (Winarto, 2018) and e-HRM antecedents, consequences, and cross-national moderators (Zhou *et al.*, 2021a). No previous study explicitly investigated the current knowledge and gaps of e-HRM adoption in a given study period. Thus, we designed the current study to fill that gap.

The objectives of this study were to find (1) the current knowledge relating to e-HRM adoption and (2) identify gaps in the current knowledge. We conducted a systematic literature review of twenty empirical studies published from 2010 to 2021 to accomplish these objectives. These studies were chosen from the Scopus database and included following the PRISMA article selection 2020 flow diagram. VOSviewer software created the results, and a bibliometric analysis was done. Study results indicated that (1) factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption/usage, (2) e-HRM value creation, (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation, have been investigated in the studies. However, the analysis of keyword co-occurrence density visualisation found that these six areas do not cover the full range of issues related to e-HRM adoption. Moreover, there are contextual gaps in Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries except for India and Bangladesh for e-HRM adoption research.

The significance of these findings may imply validating the theoretical groundings, finding evidence for testing the hypothesis, and developing measurement instruments. Similarly, the findings regarding the first objective (commonly investigated six areas) are relevant for practitioners and policymakers engaged in the e-HRM adoption decisions. The factors and outcomes synthesised in this study can influence the motivation level of adoption of the potential stakeholders. Notably, since such factors and outcomes were synthesised more scientifically with empirical research, their reliability and impact on the potential stakeholder can be enhanced. Addressing the second objective may imply that researchers develop conceptualisations based on the themes developed in this study. They can be empirically investigated and tested for their validity. Section on 'Implications to theory, practice, and future research' in the latter part of the paper provides more details on these.

The following sections of this paper provide a comprehensive description of the study methodology and findings. The methodology describes how the literature review was conducted and analysed systematically. Next, the results and findings section summarises the study's key findings. It is divided into four sections: study selection, study characteristics, study outcomes, and reporting biases. Finally, the conclusion, applications, and research implications are described.

## METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

### Literature selection process and methods

This article involves a systematic literature review. We developed a protocol specifying the inclusion criteria, analysis methods, and reporting structure of the paper. The inclusion criteria were date of publication (articles published from 2010 to 2021), keywords (given in Figure 1), document type (article), publication stage (final and articles in press), type (journal), and methodological procedure (empirical-quantitative studies). They were handled through the PRISMA article selection flow diagram. A description of the analysis method utilised is given in “methods of analysis” section. The reporting method and structure utilised were determined according to PRISMA guidelines. These PRISMA guidelines were followed as they are highly recommended for systematic literature reviews (Liberati *et al.*, 2009; Moher, 2009).

The PRISMA article selection flow diagram includes three steps: identification, screening, and inclusion. The identification stage includes the database, search terms, and search criteria. The database used for searching the articles was Scopus. The search terms were “Electronic Human Resource Management” and “Adoption.” The search criteria were “E-Human Resource Management” or “E-HRM” or “Electronic HRM” or “Digital HRM” and Adoption. The inclusion criteria for the study were the empirical studies “published in “academic journals “in “English “on “Electronic Human Resource Management “during the “2010–2021 “period. The reason for selecting 2010 as the entry point was that more articles were on e-HRM adoption retrieved in Scopus since 2010, and there were some deficiencies in the database before 2010.

The screening of articles involved two sub-steps; automatic screening through the database default options and manual screening by the study authors. The time duration (2010 to 2021), keywords (given in Figure 1), document type (article), publication stage (final and articles in press), and type (Journal) were used as the criteria for the automatic screening to include the articles. The articles that did not meet those were excluded. The manual screening was performed by study authors independently against the same criteria and excluded the articles that did not meet those criteria.

For this assessment, articles that employed empirical quantitative procedures were selected. The article selection steps are illustrated in Figure 1. The articles included or excluded at each stage are indicated in the section on ‘article selection’.

### Selection of articles for review

This study used both automation and manual assessment of articles to select them for review. It was done to avoid the risk of biases in the article selection process. Once the inclusion criteria were entered into the database, it automatically retrieved the articles. They were further screened through the screening options of the database. After that, the authors reviewed, independently from each other, each article’s abstract and methodology to find the most relevant articles complying with the inclusion criteria. The authors’ discussion and consensus resolved disagreements about including the article in the manual review process. Besides, mathematical and analytical methods like keyword co-occurrence analysis using software tools were also utilised to prevent bias in the analysis.

### Methods of analysis

The selected articles were subjected to the bibliometric analysis, using Biblioshiny and VOSviewer software. The bibliometric analysis utilises mathematical and statistical approaches to examine scientific activity on a research topic (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019; Paule-Vianez *et al.*, 2020). It offers two forms of analysis: (1) evaluation, performance, and scientific productivity analysis, and (2) scientific maps (Cobo *et al.*, 2012). Scientific map analysis entails understanding the structure, evolution, and major players in scientific research. In scientific map analysis, keywords are the most commonly used unit of analysis in the review process, like finding general knowledge on a particular area of investigation. Specifically, the relationships between different keywords are identified, and networks, known as bibliometric networks are created (Callon *et al.*, 1983). Typically, that task is carried out by utilising the co-occurrence relationship of keywords. When two keywords appear together in a



document, they form a co-occurrence relationship (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019). The VOSviewer's visualisation of that relationship in a map is known as "keyword co-occurrence network visualisation."

To gain important information about the area of investigation, we need to normalise the network visualisation and relativize the relationships between the keywords. VOSviewer, by default, uses association strength normalization to generate a network in two dimensions with strongly related nodes close to each other (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). In contrast, weakly related nodes are separated by a significant distance (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). The VOSviewer assigned the nodes to a network of clusters, with nodes that correlate highly with other nodes assigned to the same cluster (Chen *et al.*, 2016). VOSviewer also uses colours to indicate the cluster assigned to a node. As a result, a cluster can represent a common theme. Since our first objective was to find the current knowledge of e-HRM, this keyword co-occurrence analysis was used.

The density visualisation map derived from the keyword co-occurrence analysis is another analysis. It was used to achieve the study's second objective: identifying research gaps in e-HRM. The density of keywords at each position in the item density visualisation map is denoted by colour according to the VOSviewer manual. By default, the colours range from blue to green to red. The closer a position's colour is to the red, the more items it has in its direct proximity and the higher its weight.

Additionally, the software-generated "annual article publications," "average citations received," "most relevant sources where articles were published," and "country-wise article publications" were used to introduce the profile of the article set selected for the review. The first three outputs were brought from R-Biblioshiny, and the final output was from the VOSviewer.

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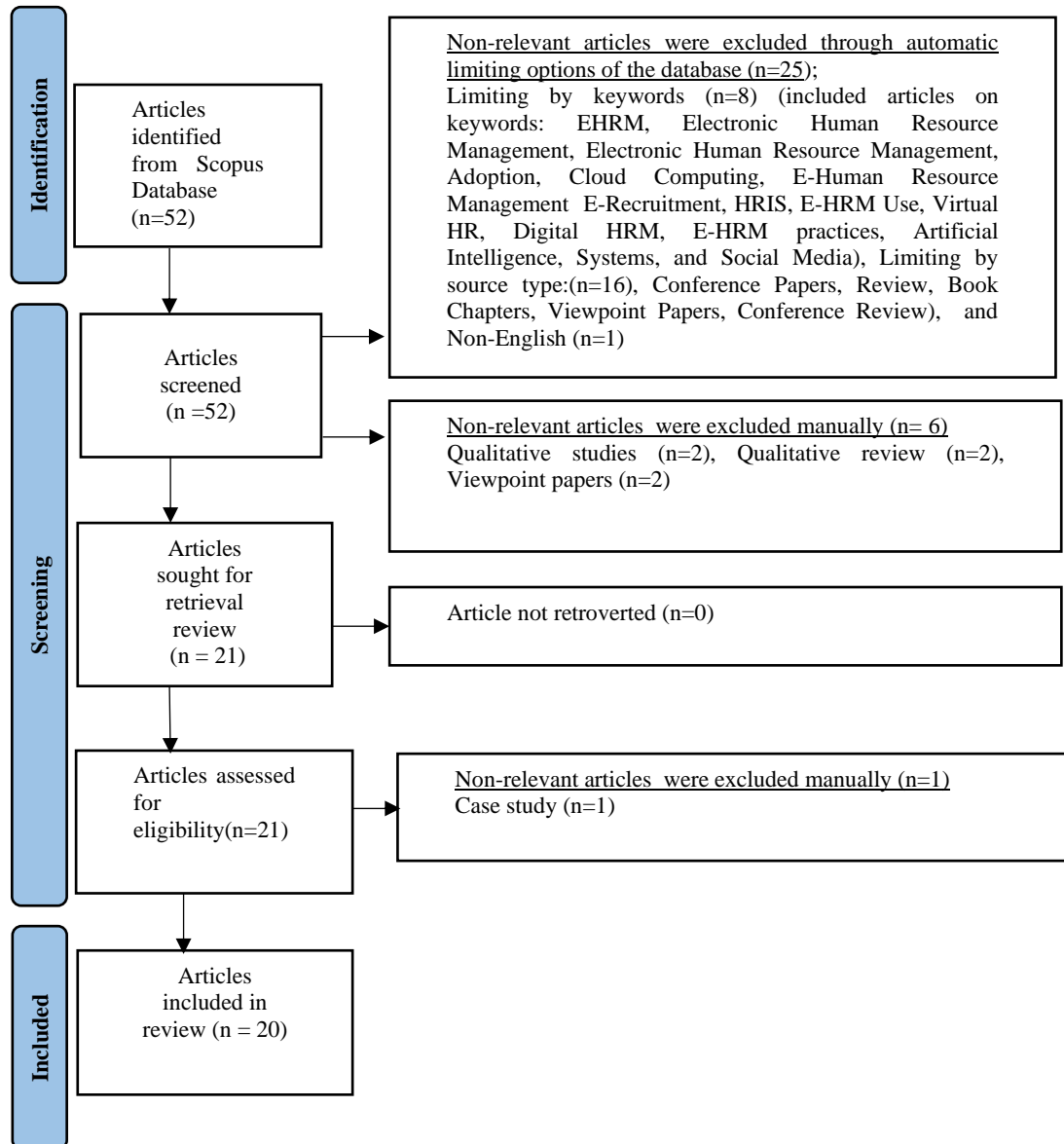
## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Article selection

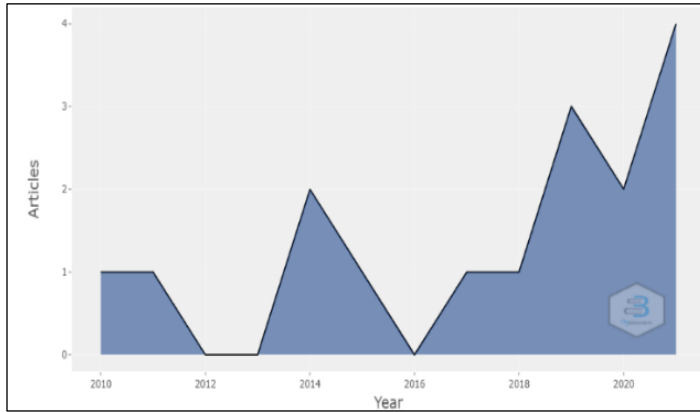
Since the PRISMA flow diagram was followed for article selection, we identified 52 articles at the identification stage. Of that, 25 articles were removed, as they were out of the considered publication duration (2010 to 2021), did not use intended keywords, were not published in journals, and were not in English, by the automatic screening options of the database. The manual screening excluded eight articles: qualitative studies, qualitative reviews, and viewpoint papers. Then the remaining 21 articles' full versions were downloaded, and their methodological reporting was further assessed under the eligibility checking of each article. We found one qualitative research using a case study approach and that was excluded. Finally, 20 articles were included in the review.

### Study characteristics

Table 1 shows the bibliometric information on the 20 articles included in the review. The number of articles included is also in Table 2, along with the other preliminary information on the articles considered in the review. According to Table 2, the 20 articles have been published in 18 journals in different countries. Forty-two (42) authors have produced those articles. There were 68 keywords, and 919 references cited in those articles. Figure 2 explains the annual article production from 2010 to 2021. Despite the ups and downs of article publications each year, publications have gradually increased. Figure 3 illustrates the average yearly citation received for e-HRM adoption research. It highlights the highest number of citations received in 2011. However, overall, the average citations have decreased over the period concerned. Figure 4 shows the country-based bibliometric coupling. It shows the countries that produced the number of articles (the higher the number larger the node size) and how countries collaborate on e-HRM adoption empirical research. Accordingly, India has been the country that produced a considerable number of e-HRM adoption research. The counties' red, green, and blue clusters show the collaboration groups. However, there is no research produced or even no collaboration during the 2010-2021 period by Sri Lanka or any other South Asian country except India and Bangladesh, which are Scopus indexed. This shows a contextual gap in e-HRM adoption empirical research. Figure 5 illustrates the source Journal bibliometric coupling. Sixteen journals have published one each, and red, blue, and green clusters of journals indicate collaboration groups.



**Figure 1:** Article selection process  
 Source(s): Authors' construct (2022)



**Figure 2:** Annual article production  
Source(s): Authors’ construct (2022)

**Table 1:** Articles included in the review

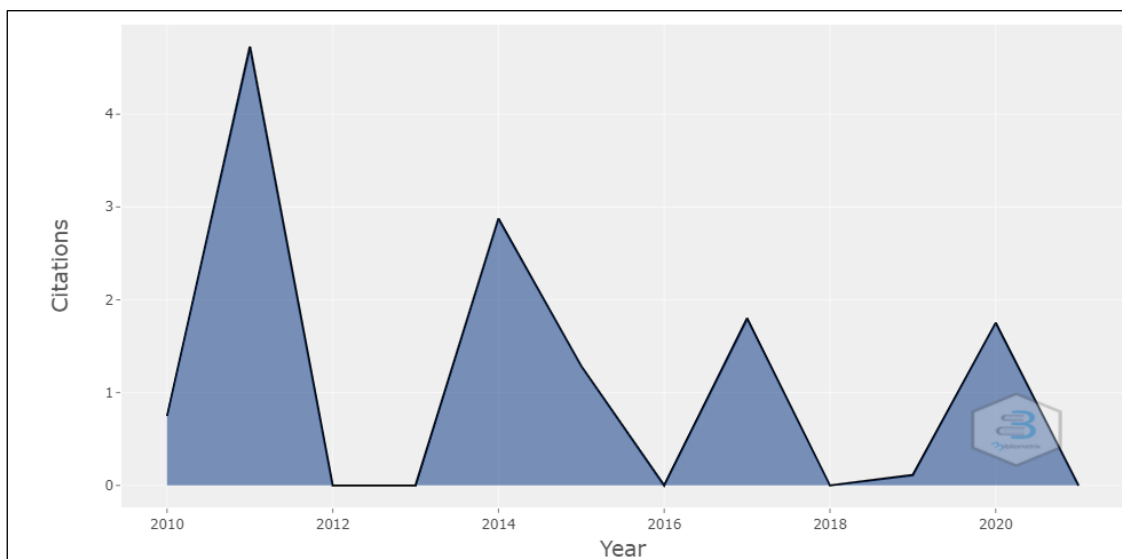
Authors	Title
Talukdar and Ganguly, 2021	A dark side of e-HRM: the mediating role of HR service delivery and HR socialization on HR effectiveness
Zhou <i>et al.</i> , 2021b	E-HRM: A meta-analysis of the antecedents, consequences, and cross-national moderators
Alam and Islam, 2021	Examining the adoption of Electronic Human Resource Management from the perspective of the Technology Organization Environment Framework
Rathee and Bhuntel, 2021	A study on employee perception of the use of e-HRM in it
Poba-Nzaou, Uwizeyemunugu and Laberge, 2020	Taxonomy of business value underlying motivations for e-HRM adoption: An empirical investigation based on HR processes
Waheed <i>et al.</i> , 2020	E-HRM implementation, adoption, and its predictors: A case of small and medium enterprises of Pakistan
Al Haziazi, 2020	Impact of e-HRM system on organizational performance in the sultanate of Oman
Al-Ajlouni, Nawafleh and Alsari, 2019	Determinants of User Acceptance of Electronic-HRM through the Extension of the UTAUT Model via the Structural Equation Modelling Approach
Giri, Paul, <i>et al.</i> , 2019	Intention to adopt e-HRM (electronic - Human resource management) in Indian manufacturing industry: An empirical study using technology acceptance model (TAM)
Srihari and Kar, 2019	Adoption of e-HRM practices in the IT industry: Concerning IT companies in Bengaluru
Giri, Chatterjee, <i>et al.</i> , 2019	Determining the ‘Acceptability of e-HRM (Electronic - Human Resource Management)’ in the Indian Food Processing Industry using Augmented Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
Zareena, 2018	Adoption of e-HRM in multinational companies
Obeidat, 2017	An examination of the moderating effect of electronic HRM on high-performance work practices and organizational performance link
Obeidat, 2016	The link between e-HRM use and HRM effectiveness: an empirical study.
Abdul Kadar Muhammad Masum, Kabir and Chowdhury, 2015	Determinants that are influencing the adoption of e-HRM: An empirical study on Bangladesh
Wahyudi and Park, 2014	Unveiling the value creation process of electronic, human resource management: An Indonesian case
Bissola and Imperatori, 2014	The unexpected side of relational e-HRM: Developing trust in the HR department
Sinha and Mishra, 2014	e-HRM attributes and internal stakeholders’ satisfaction: A quantitative study in select Indian organizations
Lin, 2011	Electronic, human resource management and organizational innovation: The roles of information technology and virtual organizational structure
De Alwis, 2010	The impact of electronic human resource management on the role of human resource managers

Source(s): Authors’ construct (2022)

**Table 2:** Preliminary information of the articles included in the review

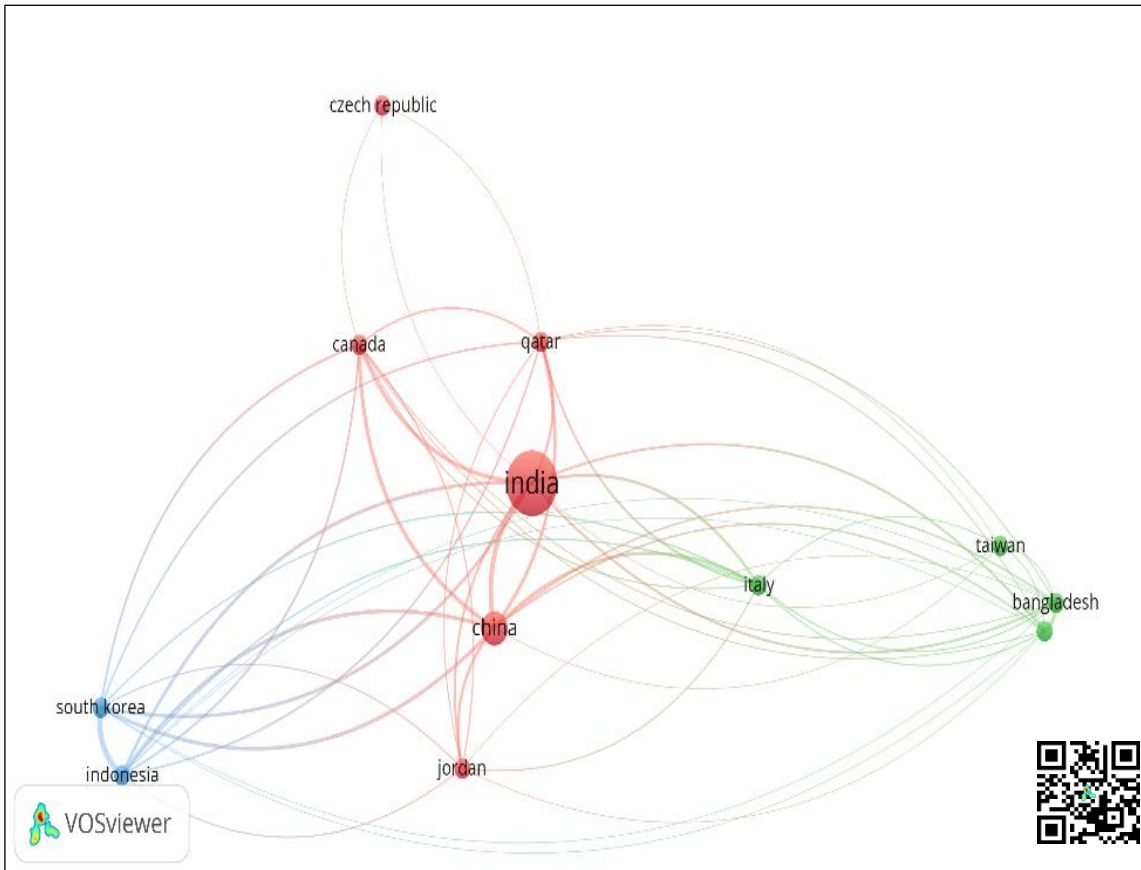
Description	Results
Timespan	2010 - 2021
Sources (Journals)	18
Articles	20
Average years from publication	4.5
Average citations per article	8.31
Average citations per year per doc	0.96
References	919
Author's Keywords	68
Number of authors	42
Number of authors in single-authored documents	4
Number of authors in multi-authored documents	38
Single-authored documents	4
Average number of authors per document	2.62
Average number of co-authors per documents	2.62

Source(s): Authors' construct (2022)

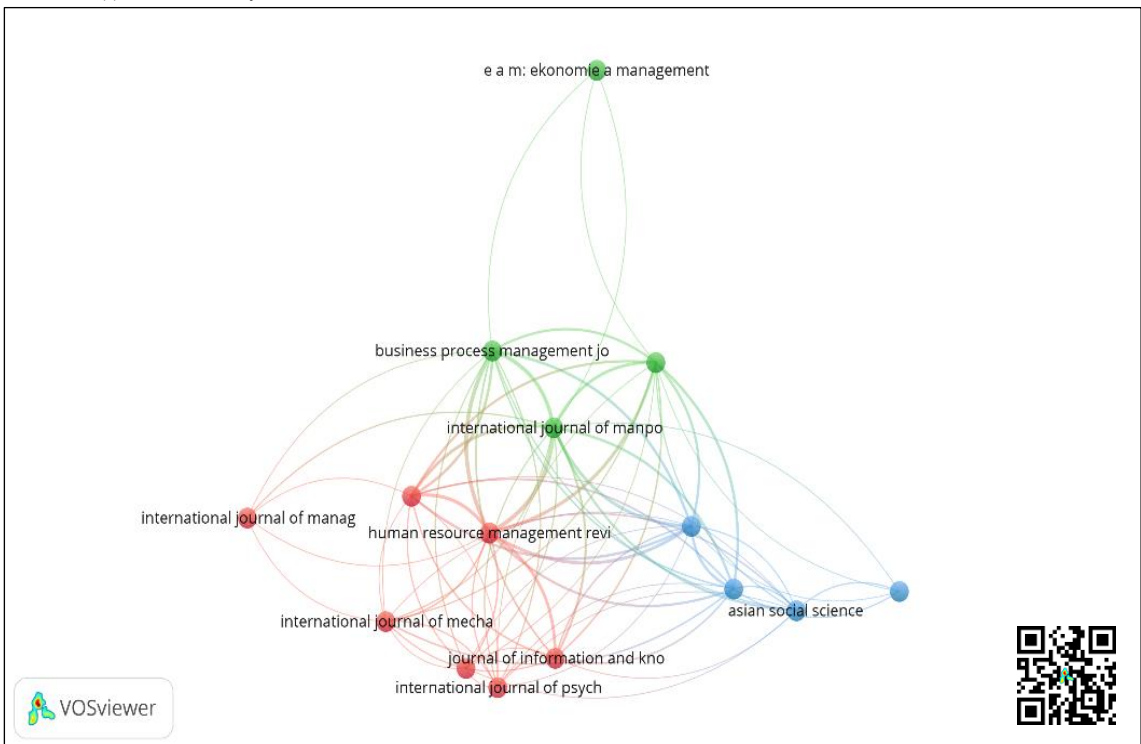


**Figure 3:** Average number of citations per article per year

Source(s): Authors' construct (2022)



**Figure 4:** Country-based bibliometric coupling  
Source(s): Authors' analysis (2022)



**Figure 5:** Source journal bibliometric coupling  
Source(s): Authors' analysis (2022)

## Results of studies

Classifying the review study results is crucial for achieving research objectives (Mehrajunnisa and Jabeen, 2020; K. G. Priyashantha, A. Chamaru De Alwis & Welmilla, 2023). Thus, this section categorises the results relevant to the study's objectives of (1) current empirical knowledge and (2) the research gaps in e-HRM adoption.

### The current empirical knowledge relating to e-HRM

The keywords capture the primary content of a research article. The regularity with which they occur together may capture the fields of research focused on a specific topic. The higher the number of keyword occurrences, the more frequently that keyword has been explored. We steadily raised the number of keywords to find the most commonly investigated keywords using the VOSviewer until the threshold level reached a point where more keywords were covered. Different threshold keyword levels were obtained by increasing the minimum occurrences of keywords, starting with one. We obtained the minimum equivalent threshold keywords of 30 for one occurrence. They were used for the analysis and review.

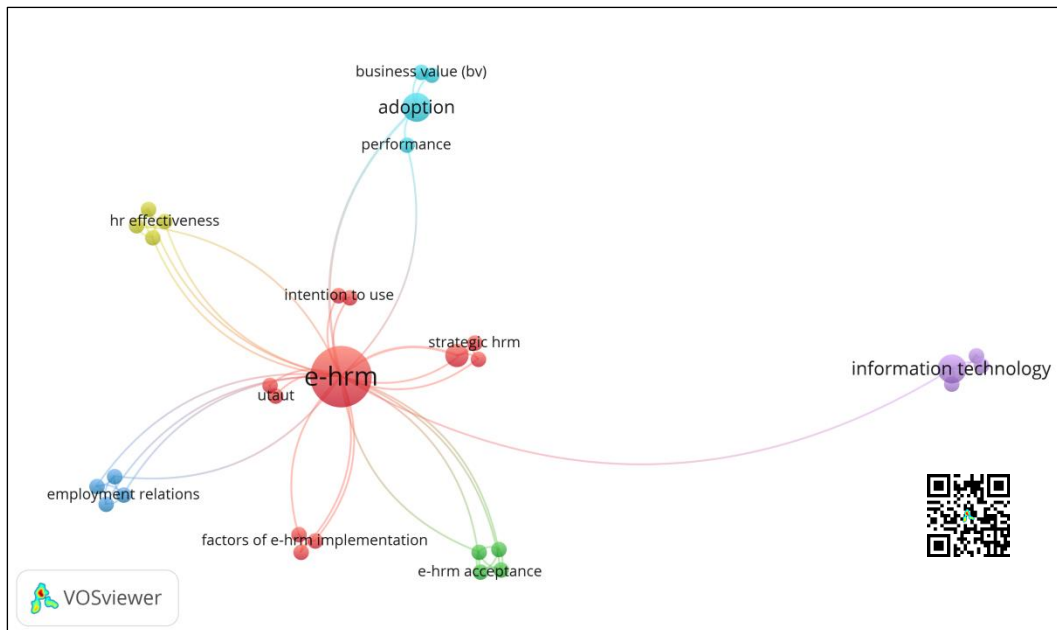
Figure 6 shows the map of the keyword co-occurrence network visualisation created by VOSviewer. The circle in the map provides the keywords used in the studies. Each keyword circle on the map is connected to another, illustrating the association between keywords. The size of a circle on the map denotes the number of times a keyword appears in various research. The circle becomes larger as the number of occurrences rises. Accordingly, the e-HRM is the largest circle on the map, denoting the highest occurrences in research. Since e-HRM was one of the search terms in our study, this outcome is understandable.

Furthermore, the circles are coloured differently, showing that the keywords are grouped into separate groups. As a result, the keywords grouped constitute a single topic known as a common theme. Figure 6 depicts many groups known as clusters with the associated keywords. They are shown in Table 3. There are six clusters, each of which denotes a common theme of (1) factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption/usage, (2) e-HRM value creation, (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation.

**Table 3:** Clusters of keywords based on their occurrence

Cluster	Theme	Keyword
Cluster 1 (11 keywords)	1	acceptance, e-HRM, factors of e-HRM implementation, high-performance work practices, intention to use, organisational support, organisational performance, strategic HRM, TAM model, usage intention, UTAUT
Cluster 2 (3 keywords)	2	perceived characteristics of technology, transformational leadership, value creation
Cluster 3 (4 keywords)	3	employment relations, procedural justice, technology innovativeness, trust in the HR department
Cluster 4 (4 keywords)	4	HR effectiveness, HR service delivery, HR socialisation, perceived HR effectiveness,
Cluster 5 (4 keywords)	5	Human resource manager, information technology, innovation, virtual organisations
Cluster 6 (4 keywords)	6	Adoption, business value, motivation, performance

Source(s): Authors' conception (2022)



**Figure 6:** The map of keyword co-occurrence network visualization for the most frequent keywords  
Source(s): Authors' analysis (2022)

### Factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption /usage (Theme 1)

E-HRM acceptance, implementation, adoption, and use have been researched interchangeably. E-HRM acceptance, implementation, and use have been used as synonyms for e-HRM adoption. Thus, the perceived usefulness, HRM strength (Wahyudi & Park, 2014), facilitative conditions (Al-Ajlouni, Nawafleh and Alsari, 2019), and behavioural intentions (Al-Ajlouni *et al.*, 2019; Giri, Paul, *et al.*, 2019) determine e-HRM acceptance/use. Top-level management support, employee attributes, system complexity, IT infrastructure, industry pressure, perceived usefulness (Wahyudi & Park, 2014), organisational support, system usefulness, users' knowledge, social influence, and people factors (Zhou *et al.*, 2021b), performance expectancy, and habits (Al-Ajlouni *et al.*, 2019) are the determinants of e-HRM adoption (Masum *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, the ease of use of the technology, information technology experience, secure systems, technology usefulness, communication tools, risk perception, usage intention, and organisational support are the determinants of e-HRM implementation (Rathee & Bhuntel, 2021). TAM model (Ajzen, 1991) and UTAUT (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003) models were used to describe e-HRM adoption (Waheed & Jianhua, 2018; Al-Ajlouni, Nawafleh and Alsari, 2019).

Behavioural intention is a determinant of e-HRM adoption; it is determined by factors such as performance expectancy and habits (Al-Ajlouni *et al.*, 2019), perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use of technology (Giri, Paul, *et al.*, 2019).

When it comes to outcomes of e-HRM, e-HRM influences-organisational performance (Obeidat, 2017; Zhou *et al.*, 2021b) and work effectiveness (Giri, Chatterjee *et al.*, 2019), and perceived human resource service quality (Wahyudi & Park, 2014; Waheed *et al.*, 2020). Instead, the e-HRM moderates the high-performance work practices -and organisational performance link (Obeidat, 2017), contributing to the success of strategic HRM (Obeidat, 2017).

### E-HRM value creation (Theme 2)

In creating e-HRM values, e-HRM usage strongly predicts perceived human resource (HR) service quality and technology characteristics (Talukdar & Ganguly, 2021). Moreover, to ensure e-HRM is used more strategically, the core business functions of an organisation, HRM strategy needs to align and integrate with IT management. This alignment and integration are known as perceived technology characteristics (Wahyudi & Park, 2014), and managers need to help improve poor performers by using transformational leadership for e-HRM use more strategically (Wahyudi & Park, 2014).

### **Strengthening the employee-HR department relationship (Theme 3)**

The e-HRM has the functionality to strengthen the relational aspect between the employees and the HRM department. Therefore, the relational e-HRM system adoption will help make procedural justice and trust in the HR department. Notably, results imply that technology innovativeness can support the development of trust in the HR department, strengthening the employee-HRM department relationship (Bissola & Imperatori, 2014).

### **The dark side of e-HRM (Theme 4)**

E-HRM adoption negatively affects human resource socialisation and HR service delivery. Human resource socialisation, in turn, is positively related to perceived HR effectiveness (Talukdar & Ganguly, 2021). Thus, the effect of e-HRM on the dehumanisation of HR processes causes adverse outcomes such as harming HR effectiveness.

### **Virtual organisations and organisational innovations (Theme 5)**

Firms are progressively incorporating information technology into human resource management. It helps HR managers fulfil their objectives in a virtual setup (Lin, 2011). Thus, virtual organisation adoption positively affects organisational innovation. To face the drastically changing environment and keen competition, HR managers are responsible for keeping themselves informed regarding the latest developments in information technology and virtual organisation to reach a competitive advantage (Zareena, 2018; Lin, 2011).

### **The motivation for strategic business value creation (Theme 6)**

The adoption of e-HRM helps become a motive to increase business value and overall organisational performance (Poba-Nzaou *et al.*, 2020). Thus, research has been conducted to understand the strategic business values (outcomes) obtained from e-HRM adoptions. Seven strategic business values can help motivate people to use e-HRM. The unipolar strategic view (high in strategic partner role), bipolar strategic view (high in the strategic partner and change agent roles), and unipolar administrative view are three of the seven (high in administrative expert) (Poba-Nzaou *et al.*, 2020). The balance four views include the institutional view (high in administrative expert), bipolar balanced view (high in administrative expert and strategic partner roles), unipolar employee view (high in employee champion role), and unipolar change agent view (high in change agent view) (Poba-Nzaou *et al.*, 2020).

### **The research gaps in e-HRM adoption**

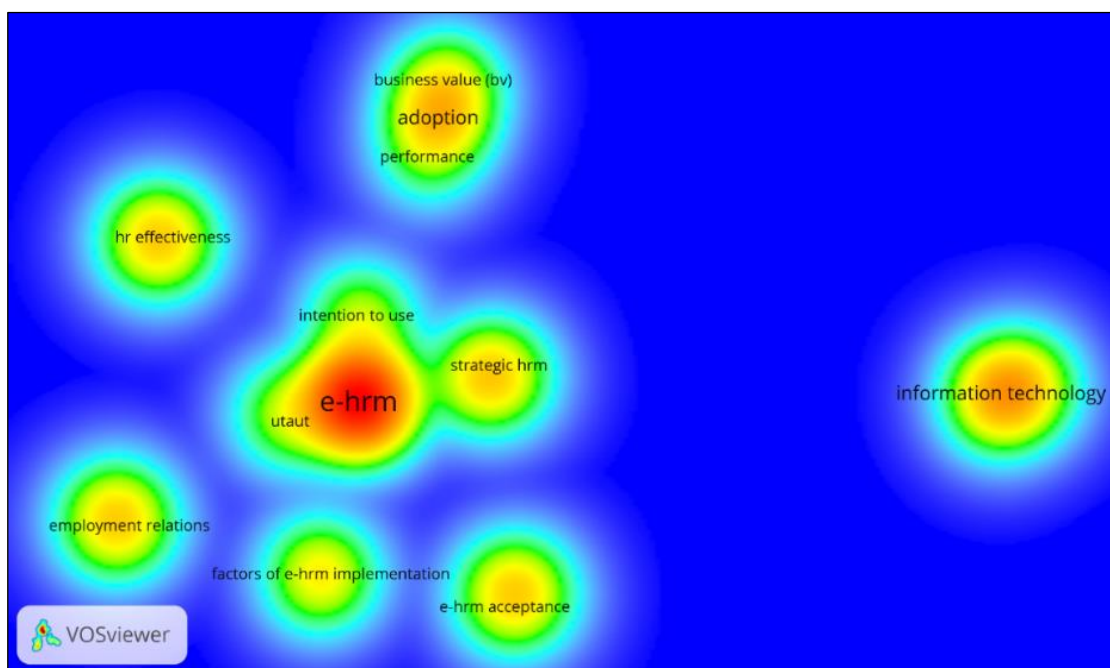
VOSviewer's manual highlights that more research is available on a particular area denoted by the keyword if that keyword is in the red background in the density visualisation map (Chen *et al.*, 2016). It is then treated as more established knowledge of the area represented by the keyword (Chen *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, if the keyword is in the green background, it is considered as limited research is available (Chen *et al.*, 2016). Thus, we included all the keywords into the VOSviewer and found only one keyword, e-HRM, frequently tested. The yellow areas of Figure 7 indicate that areas of existing investigated knowledge are not reasonably good enough for matured knowledge. According to Figure 7, information technology, HR effectiveness, adoption, strategic HRM, e-HRM implementation, e-HRM acceptance, and employee relations are the keywords in the studies that minimally investigated the e-HRM adoption research. Moreover, figure 6 created clusters by incorporating those keywords and themes in "the current empirical knowledge relating to e-HRM" as; (1) factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption/usage, (2) e-HRM value creation. (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation. Thus, the knowledge created by such themes has been on less research evidence, and hence themes do not provide enough for matured knowledge in e-HRM adoption.



The e-HRM has been designed to do all HRM functions. However, we found gaps in the empirical research environment regarding specific e-HRM functions. The e-Recruitment and Selection, e-Learning, e-Payment, e-Performance Appraisal, e-Health and Safety, e-Collaboration, e-Team Work, and e-Performance Management have yet to be researched sufficiently.

Besides, as noted in figure 4 in section “methods of analysis”, there is no research produced or even no collaboration during the 2010-2021 period by Sri Lanka or another South Asian country except India, and Bangladesh, which are Scopus indexed. The information shows a contextual gap in e-HRM adoption empirical research.

In sum, the information in this section provides the areas (knowledge gaps) and contexts (contextual gaps) for future research for future researchers.



**Figure 7:** The map of keyword co-occurrence density visualization for the most frequent keywords  
Source(s): Authors' analysis (2022)

### Reporting bias assessment

The PRISMA guidelines required the assessment of biases due to missing results in reporting the findings. We used software tools to generate the results, and they were systematically analysed based on scientific methods. The PRISMA guidelines were followed in reporting the results to avoid bias.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of each study selected for the review and their synthesis were primarily reported under the two headings, “the current empirical knowledge in e-HRM” and “the areas where empirical research is lacking in e-HRM adoption.” These two headings addressed the study’s objectives: “the current knowledge” and “areas where empirical research is lacking in e-HRM adoption.” The findings in this study reveal that six common themes of e-HRM have been investigated during the 2010-2021 period. They include (1) factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption /usage, (2) e-HRM value creation, (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation.

Concerning the (1) factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption /usage, they are represented by many theoretical groundings. The followings explain how theories can be linked to each theme derived in this study. The (1) factors

such as perceived usefulness and facilitative conditions (Al-Ajlouni, Nawafleh and Alsari, 2019), social influence (Zhou *et al.*, 2021b), perceived ease of use of technology (Giri, Paul, *et al.*, 2019) are addressed by the TAM model (Ajzen, 1991) and UTAUT (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003) models. HRM strength (Wahyudi & Park, 2014), facilitative conditions (Al-Ajlouni, Nawafleh and Alsari, 2019), behavioural intentions (Al-Ajlouni *et al.*, 2019), users' knowledge (Zhou *et al.*, 2021b), performance expectancy, and habits (Al-Ajlouni *et al.*, 2019), employee attributes (Wahyudi & Park, 2014) people factors (Zhou *et al.*, 2021b) are the people related resources that determine the e-HRM adoption. Further, top-level management support, system complexity, IT infrastructure, industry pressure (Wahyudi & Park, 2014), organisational support, and system usefulness (Zhou *et al.*, 2021b) are other resources that determine the e-HRM adoption. The resource-based view (RBV) theory (Wernerfelt, 1984) addresses these factors, emphasising that resource provision results in successful systems implementation or that jobs can be done. Thus, to successfully adopt e-HRM, organisations must have the necessary resources and capabilities to develop, implement, and maintain the system.

The (1) outcomes such as organisational performance (Obeidat, 2017; Zhou *et al.*, 2021b) and work effectiveness (Giri, Chatterjee, *et al.*, 2019), and perceived human resource service quality (Wahyudi & Park, 2014; Waheed *et al.*, 2020) are addressed by the RBV. Further, Themed outcomes such as (2) e-HRM value creation, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the RBV theory also addresses the motivation for strategic business value creation. According to RBV, The e-HRM adoption of an organisation is a provision of resources that generates those positive results.

The social exchange theory (Blau, 1968; Emerson, 1976; Cook *et al.*, 2013) supports (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship. The theory suggests that people maintain relationships based on exchanging resources, such as information or support, to receive positive outcomes or benefits from the relationship. The e-HRM adoptions can lead to a more positive and productive relationship between the HR department and employees, as using electronic tools and systems can provide both parties with valuable resources and benefits.

The Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Thornton *et al.*, 2012) can explain (4) the dark side of e-HRM. The theory suggests that organisations that fail to conform to the expectations of their institutional environment (interactions, norms, values, and culture) may face negative consequences, such as reduced legitimacy or support. In the context of e-HRM adoption, using electronic tools and systems may conflict with the traditional norms and values of the HR department and the broader organisational culture. For example, using e-HRM systems may be perceived as impersonal and dehumanising, decreasing human interaction and socialisation. This may negatively impact the quality of HR service delivery, as employees may feel that their needs and concerns are not being adequately addressed.

The limitations of the current study also need to be noted. Since the current study only covered 20 articles, it may not represent the entire range of research on this subject. We must also note that we used only one database to find the articles for the review. Furthermore, we only considered quantitative studies on the subject, disregarding qualitative research which often brings a more critical perspectives relating to e-HRM and its adoption in different contexts. Finally, exclusion of purely conceptual enquiries as against empirical studies may also serve as a limiting factor since it has the effect of eliminating higher level analysis on this topic.

Moreover, e-HRM is designed to deliver efficient and effective service outcomes to organisations implementing e-HRM. However, we discovered gaps in the empirical research landscape for specific e-HRM outcomes. Limited studies focused on e-HRM innovations, e-HRM effectiveness, HR service delivery, business value, and value creation using e-HRM technologies. Therefore, these vital areas remain poorly researched at present. Moreover, we found contextual gaps in empirical research relating to e-HRM adoption. Scopus indexed research on the selected topic is particularly lacking in Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries, with the exception of India and Bangladesh. Having published in Scopus indexed journals can bring numerous benefits to researchers, such as increased visibility, citation analysis, benchmarking, collaboration and networking opportunities, and access to funding opportunities. Furthermore, e-HRM is intended to do all HRM functions (Omran & Anan, 2019). However, we did detect certain gaps in the empirical research environment regarding specific e-HRM functions. e-Recruitment and Selection, e-Learning, e-Payment, e-Performance Appraisal, e-

Health and Safety, Collaboration, e-Team Work, and e-Performance Management are yet to be supported by appropriate applied research.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted working patterns in organizations so as to inhibit required change. The information technologies and the e-HRM are some of the key areas adversely affected by this situation. However, we did not find any article that examined the pandemic impact in relation to e-HRM adoption, because we were limited to one database.

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## CONCLUSION

Firms incorporate information technologies, including e-HRM, into human resource management to cope with technological challenges. It directly contributes to organisational effectiveness and creates various alternatives to accomplish the work efficiently. Researchers have investigated many aspects of the adoption of the e-HRM. However, a synthesis of the different findings relating to e-HRM adoption is lacking. In order to address this knowledge gap, we conducted a review study on the last decade's empirical investigations on e-HRM adoption.

This review identified six common themes of e-HRM have been investigated during the period. They are (1) factors and outcomes of E-HRM adoption /usage, (2) e-HRM value creation, (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation. These themes highlight two main areas of investigation. They are factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption. Various factors have been investigated. The outcomes include both positive and negative results. The positive outcomes are organisational performance, work effectiveness, perceived human resource service quality, employee-HR department relationship, virtual organisations, organisational innovations, and strategic business value creation. The negative outcomes are synthesised under the dark theme of e-HRM, including lesser socialisation and HR service delivery that results in perceived HR ineffectiveness.

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## IMPLICATIONS TO THEORY, PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study's findings provide implications for theory, practitioners, policymakers, and future researchers. Theoretical implications include the six themes that validate the idea postulated by the TAM model (Ajzen, 1991), UTAUT (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003), The RBV (Wernerfelt, 1984), Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1968; Emerson, 1976; Cook *et al.*, 2013), and Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Thornton *et al.*, 2012). The six themes are new knowledge in e-HRM adoption contributing to the literature. Moreover, the six themes found can be treated as factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption that can be incorporated into a conceptual model. The hypothesis can be developed for each factor and outcome as they have been found based on empirical evidence. Thus, the conceptual model may be empirically tested, and the measurement instruments for each factor and outcome can be developed using the keywords clustered under each theme.

Concerning the findings' implication to practice, a synthesis of findings of all the empirical studies done during 2010-2021 is presented in six themes. They represent the factors and outcomes of e-HRM adoption. Various factors and outcomes are influential in shaping their level of motivation to adopt e-HRM systems. Thus, the practitioners and policymakers can refer to them in e-HRM adoption decisions.

The future researchers provide four implications for their future research directions. Firstly, the common themes found in this study, explained in section "The current empirical knowledge relating to e-HRM", can be taken as their future research directions. Because we found that, as explained in section "The research gaps in e-HRM adoption", they do not provide established knowledge as they have been derived from minimal research. The common themes include (1) factors and outcomes of E-HRM adoption /usage, (2) e-HRM value creation, (3) strengthening the employee-HR department relationship, (4) the dark side of e-HRM, (5) virtual organisations and organisational innovations, and (6) the motivation for strategic business value creation. Notably, these themes could be taken for further research. They can develop conceptual framework/s incorporating these themes to test

empirically. The findings categorised under each theme can be used as dimensions in measurement development when the themes are investigated empirically.

Secondly, the e-HRM is intended to do all HRM functions. However, we found gaps in the empirical research environment regarding specific e-HRM functions. The e-Recruitment and Selection, e-Learning, e-Payment, e-Performance Appraisal, e-Health and Safety, e-Collaboration, e-Team Work, and e-Performance Management have yet to be researched sufficiently.

Thirdly, as noted in Figure 7 in section “The research gaps in e-HRM adoption”, there is no research produced or even no collaboration during the 2010-2021 period by Sri Lanka or another South Asian country except India, and Bangladesh, which are Scopus indexed. The information shows a contextual gap in e-HRM adoption empirical research. Thus e-HRM adoption research in the six themes mentioned above can be taken in these contexts for further research. Since these countries are almost developing, researchers can examine how far the factors and outcomes are validated in those contexts.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted organizations’ working patterns to change significantly. The information technologies and the e-HRM supported that. However, we did not find any article that brought pandemic impact to the e-HRM in this review. Therefore, that can be taken for further research.

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Common methods and outcomes of employee engagement: a systematic literature review towards identifying gaps in research

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**Abstract:** As global surveys reported, employee engagement is currently in crisis. Hence, this study aimed to discover (1) common methods and outcomes of employee engagement and (2) research gaps relating to employee engagement. The study employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology. Publications selected for this review were based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, as it is recommended for SLRs. The review included two 260 studies published in Scopus from 2008 to 2021. The studies were analysed through bibliometric analysis for reviewing purposes and achieving the two objectives. Findings indicate different methods and outcomes of employee engagement.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement; PRISMA; systematic literature review.

## INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is a psychological presence in organisational roles (Kahn, 1990). It induces employees to be energetic, passionate and involved mentally, physically, and emotionally (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010) toward achieving the organisation's expectations (Saks, 2006a ; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Hence, engaged employees can always go the extra mile for the sake of their organization (Turner, 2020). They do not work just for payment or the next promotion but for the organisation's goals (Kruse, 2012). This concept has been of significant interest as it is directly associated with organisational success through higher financial performance, productivity, sales, and customer satisfaction (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rana *et al.*, 2014; Saks, 2006a). Moreover, employee engagement predicts employee outcomes such as well-being through greater life satisfaction and retention (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shimazu *et al.*, 2012; Rana *et al.*, 2014).

According to a Gallup report, employee engagement is in crisis, with barely 20 per cent of people worldwide engaged in their jobs (Gallup, 2021). It signifies that they have mentally and emotionally left the job while remaining physically present (Turner, 2020). It can significantly hurt organisations by negatively impacting productivity and financial performance (Purcell, 2014). Thus, employee disengagement can be costly to an employer (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017), as most employees are paid and receive benefits while their energy is spent elsewhere (Pech & Slade, 2006).

Similarly, employee disengagement can create some potential dangers for employees as well. No learning opportunities received (Allam, 2017), health problems such as more headaches, stomach problems (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Allam, 2017), and higher stress/burnout (Buys & Rothmann, 2010), are some examples. Besides, higher conflict among peers and supervisors and low life satisfaction (Shimazu *et al.*, 2012) are other potential problems created for employees. Moreover, evidence suggests that disengagement causes a higher rate of accidents and safety problems since employees' low concentration of hazardous elements at work ignores defects in machines, tools, and equipment. Thus, employee engagement has emerged as one of the organisation's most significant challenges today (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Hence, employers and researchers are interested in improving engagement (Rana *et al.*, 2014; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008).

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In such a background, there is a scholarly thought and practical implication that Human Resource Management practices can drive employee engagement (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Guest, 1997; 2011; Turner, 2020). Because engagement is a positive psychological state and fundamentally a motivational construct (Turner, 2020) that can be boosted through all the HRM practices (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Garibaldo & Rebecchi, 2018; Guest, 2014). This idea has been explored further through various studies found in the literature. Empirical studies are among the several types of research. They are regarded as high quality since they adhere to uniform protocols and employ rigorous scientific techniques to support their conclusions (Okoli & Schabram, 2010). Thus, empirical research is advised to be included in systematic literature reviews since they should adhere to more rigorous scientific methods (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, the results of the Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs) can guarantee enough methodological consistency (Okoli & Schabram, 2010) and internal validity (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), which is a gauge of how well a study is done (its structure) and how precisely its conclusions represent the examined subjects. Thus, for these reasons, we covered empirical studies on employee engagement in this review.

The reviews of the literature on employee engagement have covered many different topics. The factors (Wollard & Shuck, 2011; Megha, 2016; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019; Kwon & Kim, 2020), resources (Lee *et al.*, 2020), transformational leadership (Chin *et al.*, 2019), and human resource development (Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2017) affect employee engagement in one way or another. They also go into emerging perspectives (Shuck, 2011), a positive organisational behaviour perspective (Jeung, 2011), definitions, approaches (Megha, 2016), meaning, measurements (Ababneh & Macky, 2015), and customer engagement (Chandni & Rahman, 2020). Identifying gaps (Borah & Barua, 2018), employee engagement management in Covid-19 (Andrić *et al.*, 2023), and outcomes (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2020), such as well-being and organisational performance (Guest, 2014), innovative behaviour (Kwon & Kim, 2020), and employee performance (Motyka, 2018; Satata, 2021) of employee engagement have also been covered. However, there are gaps of these reviews regarding the methods and outcomes of employee engagement. This assessment covers relevant studies from 2000-2021.

The aggregation, interpretation, explanation, and integration of existing research (Rousseau *et al.*, 2008) or a synthesis of all studies are essential to identify the way forward to employee engagement (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Overall, empirical knowledge about employee engagement needs updating with the latest findings as the socio-technical environment is continuously evolving (Andrić *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, employee engagement literature must be updated to show how methods and outcomes may contribute to better employee engagement. The findings may help identify future research directions, as which will be detailed in the Conclusion section.

Thus, in this paper, by adopting a systematic literature review methodology and Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, we focused on reviewing the empirical research on which areas of employee engagement have been addressed. Thus, the research questions addressed here were; (1) what are the common methods and outcomes of employee engagement? (2) what are research gaps relating to employee engagement? In order to achieve these objectives, we included the 260 empirical studies published during the 2008–2021-year period. The following sections outline the methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, and implications for future research.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted based on SLR methodology. As the PRISMA guidelines are recommended for SLRs (Liberati *et al.*, 2009), we adopted them for this study. Specifically, the PRISMA has three steps for article selection presented by a flow diagram. It includes identification, screening, and selection.

The identification stage involves determining the search terms, search criteria, databases, and data extraction method. Thus, the current study's search term was Employee Engagement. The search criteria were "Employee Engagement" OR "Work Engagement." We typed them into the Scopus database. The initial search results were limited to the 2008 -2021 period.

The screening of articles has two sub-steps: screening and eligibility checking. It excludes the articles that do not meet the inclusion criteria (Meline, 2006). The inclusion criteria for the study were the empirical studies published in "Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC)" listed "Academic journals" in "English" on "Employee Engagement" or "Work Engagement" during the "2008-2021" period. As the "ABDC" listed articles are treated as more comprehensive (Mura & Pahlevan Sharif, 2015), they were selected for the review. PRISMA proposes two criteria for screening the articles: report characteristics and study characteristics. The year of publication, publication type (e.g., research notes, editors' comments, books, book chapters, book reviews, conference proceedings, and unpublished data), and publication language include report characteristics. We used it for screening the articles. That was done through automation with the limiting options of the database and manually. The study characteristics include population, methodology, methods, design, and context. The assessment of study characteristics is generally known as assessing the methodological reporting (Meline, 2006). It can be used for eligibility checking. It was done manually by the authors.

Then, the authors must ensure that each article meets all inclusion criteria in that manual assessment. A minimum acceptable level for each article can be set (Meline, 2006). Thus, studies that meet the minimum acceptable level are included in the review, while those that do not achieve the minimum acceptable level are excluded (Meline, 2006; Priyashantha & Dilhani, 2022). The reasons may be "incomplete or ambiguous methods," "reviewers seek further information from the original study authors," and "important information is not available." Accordingly, we set the minimum acceptable level as "the empirical studies that employed quantitative techniques." We independently assessed each article against the criteria, and disagreements (if any) were resolved through discussion and consensus. The reasons for the exclusion will be explained in the section.

We used the bibliometric analysis using the Biblioshiny and VOSviewer for the data analysis. The bibliometric analysis uses mathematical approaches to examine scientific approaches in research (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019; Paule-Vianez *et al.*, 2020). It provides two types of analysis (1) evaluation, performance, and scientific productivity, and (2) scientific maps (Cobo *et al.*, 2012). In that, the "annual article publications," "average citations received," "most relevant sources articles published," and "country-wise article publications" were generated and analyzed to introduce the profile of the article set selected for the review. The first three outputs were generated from Biblioshiny of R, and the final output was generated from the VOSviewer.

Scientific maps help analyse scientific investigation's structure, evolution, and key players (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019). Among the various units of analysis used, one common is the keyword. The keywords of a research article denote its primary content. Using the keywords, different bibliometric networks are created (Callon *et al.*, 1983). Usually, the co-occurrence relationship of the keywords is used to accomplish this task. When two keywords appear in a document together, this is known as a co-occurrence relationship (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019; Priyashantha, Dahanayake, & Maduwanthi, 2022). The VOSviewer provides a map called "keyword co-occurrence network visualisation," showing how the keywords are related. VOSviewer generates a network in a two-dimensional space using association strength normalisation by default. That network locates strongly associated nodes together, while weakly related nodes are spread out (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). These near-together nodes are

known as clusters and may represent a common theme. Moreover, different colours denote the clusters. Since one of our objectives was to find the common methods and outcomes of employee engagement, this keyword co-occurrence analysis was utilised.

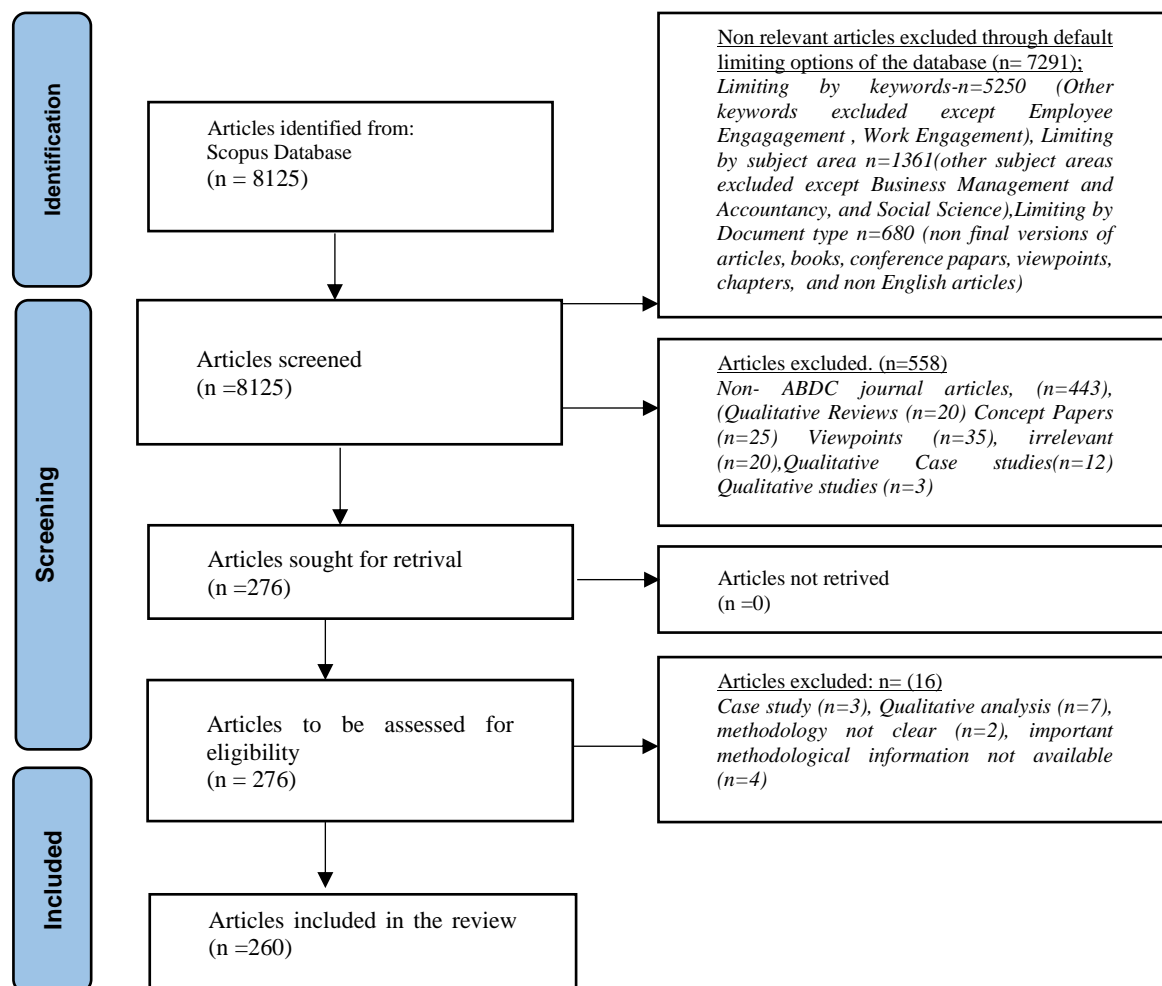
The density visualisation map obtained from the keyword co-occurrence analysis is another procedure followed. It was used to accomplish the study's second objective; to identify areas lacking empirical evidence relating to employee engagement. The density of keywords at each place in the item density visualisation map is shown by colour, according to the VOSviewer manual (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). By default, the colour range from blue to green to red. The bigger the number of nodes in a position's local region and the higher its weights, the closer its colour is to red. The fewer nodes in a point's immediate vicinity and the lower the weights, on the other hand, the closer the point's hue is to blue. To do this, we looked for keywords that fell into the blue or green categories.

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## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Article selection

Once the search criteria were coded in the database, the initial results generated were 8125 articles. Through automation, using the default limiting options of the database, we screened them to 834 articles. They were downloaded as an MS Excel sheet. Then, the authors manually screened the articles based on the articles published in ABDC-listed journals and the publication type (a characteristic of the report). 116 ABDC quality-listed journal articles (9-A\*, 32-A, 32-B, and 43-C ranked) were included. Non-ABDC journal articles and qualitative reviews, concept papers, viewpoints, qualitative case studies, qualitative studies, and irrelevant articles were excluded. Then, 276 articles were retained for eligibility checking. At this stage, full articles were assessed against their methodological quality. In our assessment, we found articles on "case study method," "qualitative analysis," "methodology not clear," and "important methodological information not available". They were excluded, and finally, 260 articles were retained for review. This entire article selection process is shown in Figure 1. Then, the MS Excel sheet was modified to fit the bibliographic analysis requirements.



**Figure 1:** PRISMA 2020 flow diagram  
Source: Authors’ construct (2023)

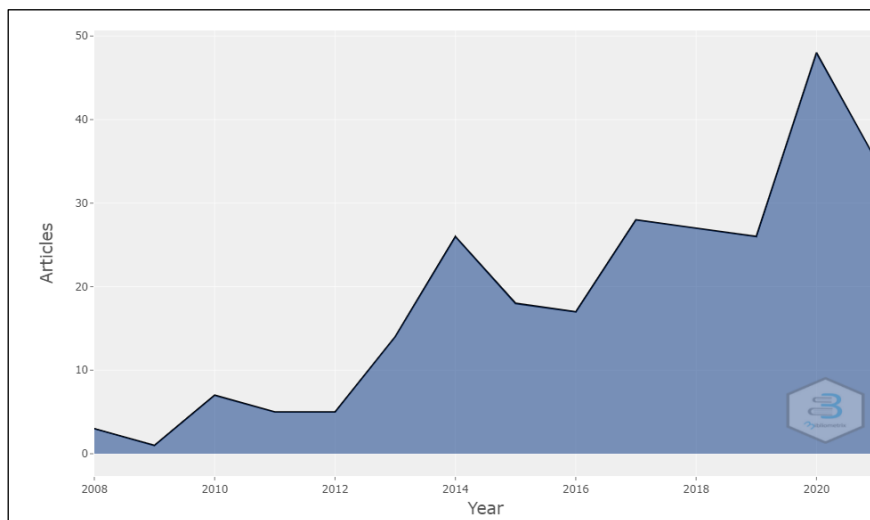
**Article characteristics**

Although the 2000-2021 period was considered for the study, articles were found from 2008. The articles were ABDC ranked, and the ranking system started in 2008. Thus, the review included 260 articles published in 116 journals from 57 countries. There was a total of 16778 references included. This basic information about the articles included in the review is shown in Table 1. Year-wise article production is shown in Figure 2. It reveals that the number of articles published has increased during the period. The figure shows that the highest number of articles were produced in 2020. Figure 3 shows the most relevant sources of the articles. It summarises the 20 journals that have published more than four articles on employee engagement. Accordingly, the International Journal of Human Resource Management (14 articles), Journal of Managerial Psychology (10 articles), Human Resource Development Quarterly, Personnel Review, and Public Relations Review (seven articles each) reported having the highest number of publications. Besides those, Figure 4 shows the highest 25 countries that have produced more than four articles out of 57 countries. It summarises how each country is interdependent with the others. In particular, the node in the map denotes the number of occurrences. Thus, Figure 4 reveals that USA, India, and China have made the highest number of publications, first, second and third. Moreover, Figures 2 and 5 clearly show the increasing publications and popularity (in terms of citations) of employee engagement research during the period.

**Table 1:** Preliminary information of articles included for the review

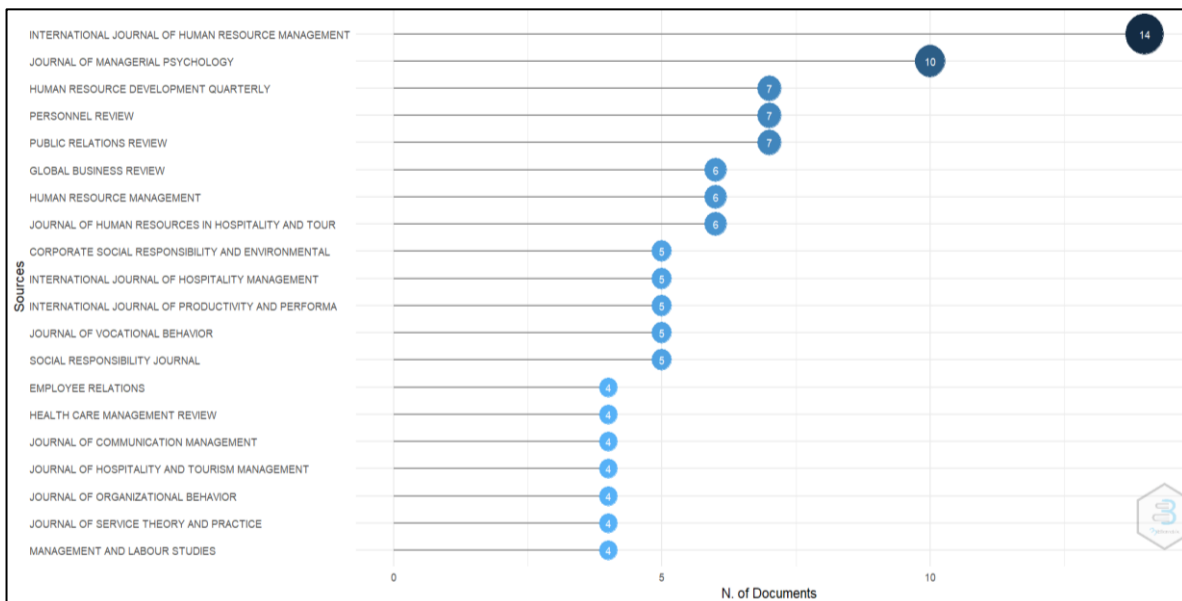
Description	Results
Time	2008:2021
Sources (Academic Journals)	116
Journal Articles	260
Countries	57
Average Years from Publication	3.86
Average Citations Per Document	28.89
Average Citations Per Year Per Doc	4.839
References	16778

Source: Authors' construct (2023)



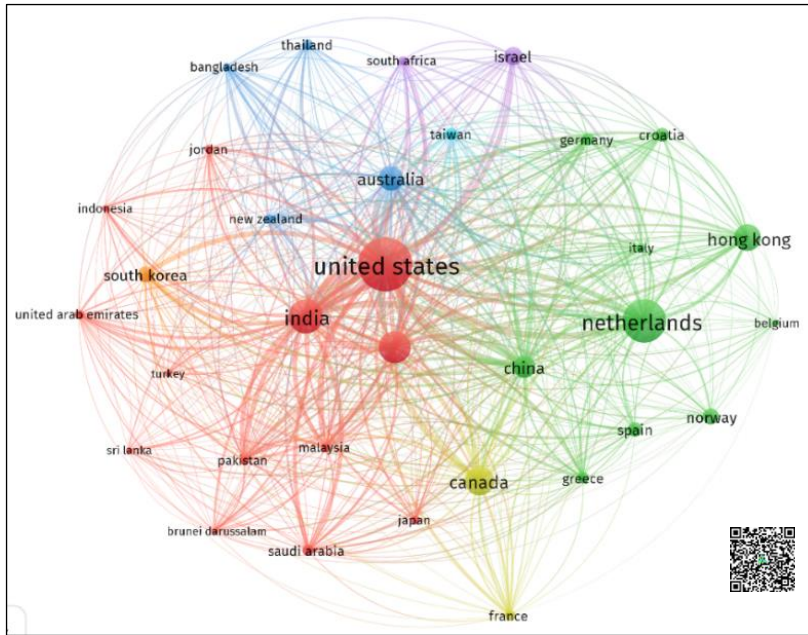
**Figure 2:** Year-wise article publication

Source: Review data (2023)

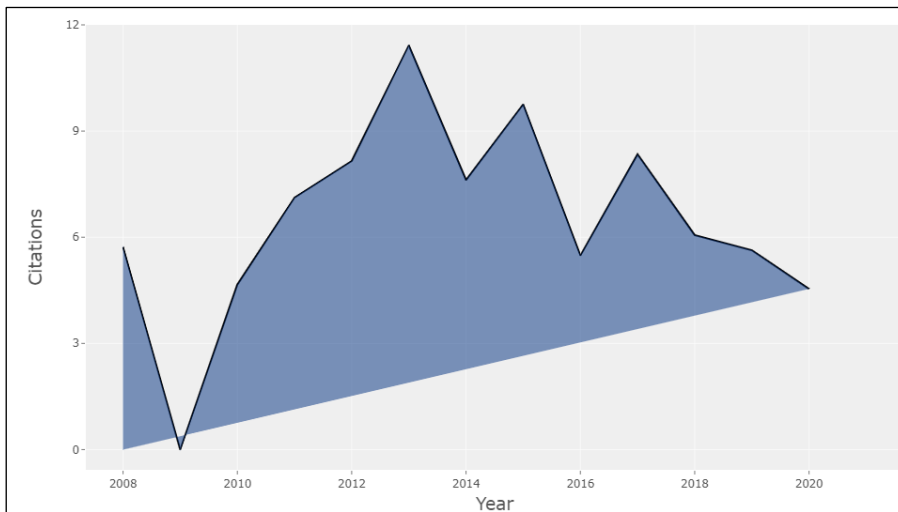


**Figure 3:** Most relevant sources and articles published

Source: Review data (2023)



**Figure 4:** Country-wise article publications.  
Source: Review data (2023)



**Figure 5:** Average citations received  
Source: Review data (2023)



## Results of studies

This section outlines the results and findings of this review. As specified in the methodology, the keyword co-occurrence network analysis of VOSviewer was used. Thus, if a particular keyword highly occurs, the area denoted by that keyword has been commonly researched. Therefore, the keyword co-occurrence analysis is ideal for finding (1) common methods and outcomes of employee engagement and (2) the areas where empirical research lacks employee engagement.

### The common methods of promoting and outcomes of employee engagement

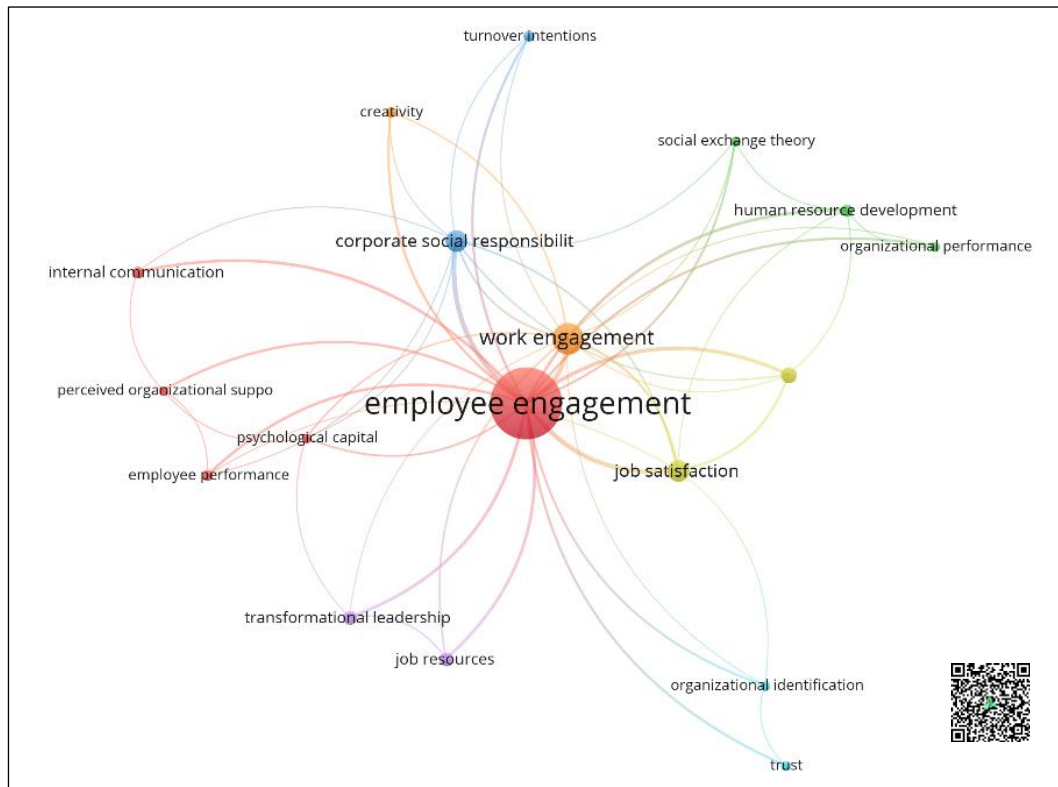
Using the VOSviewer software, we got 18 keywords at the five occurrences. They are shown in Table 2, indicating that employee engagement and work engagement have been frequently investigated. Other than that, the keywords shown in Table 2 represent the highly occurred keywords indicating that they have gained the attention of the researchers during the period. Hence, they are the most common areas for employee engagement research.

**Table 2:** Top ten keywords that have the highest number of occurrences

Keyword	Occurrences
Employee engagement	225
Work engagement	40
Corporate social responsibility	21
Job satisfaction	17
Organizational commitment	12
Job resources	9
Transformational leadership	9
Human resource development	7
Internal communication	7
Employee performance	6
Creativity	6
Turnover intentions	6
Organizational performance	5
Perceived organizational support	5
Psychological capital	5
Organizational identification	5
Social exchange theory	5
Trust	5

Source: Authors' construct (2023)

Moreover, Figure 6 shows the network visualisation map for keyword co-occurrence generated by VOSviewer. It shows the keyword by nodes connecting each keyword. The nodes' size in the map denotes the number of occurrences. Thus, the higher the number of occurrences, the larger the node's size. Accordingly, the highest occurrences were reported as "employee engagement" and "work engagement." The rest of the keywords are denoted in nodes depending on the frequency of their occurrences. Hence the size of the circle in the map further confirms the information in Table 2. The circles in the map in Figure 6 are in four clusters: red, green, blue, yellow, purple, light blue, and orange. These clusters indicate that employee engagement research varied by different areas of investigation. Thus, each cluster includes keywords likely to represent a common theme. They include "support, communication, and psychological capital", "opportunities for learning and development", "social exchange and organisational performance", "CSR activities and employee retention", "job-related positive attitudes", "job resources and transformational leadership style", "sense of belongingness and trust", and "opportunities for creativity". These common themes and areas under which investigations are discussed in detail.



**Figure 6:** Network visualisation map for keyword co-occurrences  
Source: Review data (2023)

**Table 3:** Keywords categorisation into clusters

Cluster	Keywords
Red (6 Keywords)	Employee engagement, internal communication, perceived organisational support, psychological capital, employee performance
Green (4 Keywords)	Human resource development, organisational performance, social exchange theory,
Blue (2 Keywords)	Corporate social responsibility, turnover intentions
Yellow (2 Keywords)	Job satisfaction, organisational commitment
Purple (2 Keywords)	Job resources, transformational leadership
Light Blue (2 Keywords)	organisational identification, trust
Orange (2 Keywords)	Creativity, work engagement

Source: Review data (2023)

**Support, communication, and psychological capital (Red cluster)**

Perceived organisational support determines employee engagement (Nazir & Islam, 2017; Bentley *et al.*, 2019; Sihag, 2021). Moreover, the influence of perceived organisational support on organisational culture impacts employee engagement (Brunetto *et al.*, 2014).

Internal communication, such as upward communication (Ruck *et al.*, 2017), symmetrical communication (Kang & Sung, 2017), and internal CSR communication (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018), determine employee engagement. Similarly, internal communication satisfaction (Karanges *et al.*, 2015; Tkalac Verčić & Pološki Vokić, 2017; Tkalac Verčić, 2021) determines employee engagement.

Psychological capital refers to employees’ psychological resource capabilities (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, positive mindset, and resilience) as a determinant of employee engagement (Li *et al.*, 2018; Chen & Peng, 2021;

Sihag, 2021). Moreover, an organisation's psychological capital influences perceived organisational support (fairness and supervisor support), resulting in employee engagement (Sihag, 2021).

Employee engagement results from employee engagement (Carter *et al.*, 2018). The different factors, work-family conflict (Kengatharan & Kunatilakam, 2020), job crafting (Tims *et al.*, 2015), and CSR activity participation, result in increased meaningfulness and a sense of purpose (Nazir *et al.*, 2021), determine the employee engagement that in turn results in increased job performance (Nazir *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, the effect of the leader-member relationship on higher job resources becomes an antecedent to employee engagement resulting in higher job performance (Breevaart *et al.*, 2015).

### ***Opportunities for learning and development, social exchange, and organisational performance (Green cluster)***

Human resource development (HRD) is a determinant of employee engagement. Notably, meaningful work in HRD practices (Fairlie, 2011), support for HRD activities (Shuck *et al.*, 2011), and development of HR practices (training opportunities, career development opportunities, and developmental performance appraisal) (Kura *et al.*, 2019), training and development (Presbitero, 2017; Soliman & Wahba, 2019) or training satisfaction (Memon *et al.*, 2021) are the determinants of employee engagement. Moreover, organisational commitment through training and development determines employee engagement (Aktar & Pangil, 2018).

Organisational performance results from employee engagement (Payambarpour & Hooi, 2015; Schneider *et al.*, 2018; Soliman & Wahba, 2019; Ahmed *et al.*, 2020; Sabu & Manoj, 2020).

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) is not a determinant or an outcome of employee engagement. It has been used to describe employee engagement. The theory postulates that employees have high commitments and engagements when given more resources (Kahn, 1990). Thus, the theory has underpinned the positive relationship between job resources and employee engagement ("Miracle" Qi, Ellinger, & Franke, 2018; Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021).

### ***CSR activities and employee retention (Blue cluster)***

Allowing employees to participate in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities results in meaningfulness, compassion, and satisfaction, which helps increase employee engagement (Lu *et al.*, 2020; Nazir *et al.*, 2021). Thus, employees' perception of employer CSR activities is a factor of employee engagement (Chaudhary, 2017; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Farrukh *et al.*, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2018; Rupp *et al.*, 2018; Smith & Langford, 2011; Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018; Wang, Hu *et al.*, 2020). The engagement, in turn, results in reduced turnover intentions (Memon *et al.*, 2021; Sandhya & Sulphrey, 2020; Wang, Hu *et al.*, 2020). It concludes that CSR activities are an excellent retention strategy for employees through high levels of employee engagement.

### ***Job-related positive attitudes (Yellow cluster)***

Job satisfaction determines employee engagement (Delina & Samuel, 2020; Hameduddin & Lee, 2021; Lee & Ok, 2016; Loor-Zambrano *et al.*, 2020; Myrden & Kelloway, 2015). Contrarily, it is an outcome of employee engagement (Lee *et al.*, 2014; Karanika-Murray *et al.*, 2015; Almeida *et al.*, 2016; Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2017; Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018; Moletsane *et al.*, 2019; Pradhan & Gupta, 2021).

Organisational commitment is also a determinant of employee engagement. It refers to employees' commitment to their job (Aktar & Pangil, 2018; Nienaber & Martins, 2020; Agarwal *et al.*, 2021). Notably, two commitment types, affective commitment (Shuck *et al.*, 2011; Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014; Gyensare *et al.*, 2015; Kaur *et al.*, 2020; Einwiller *et al.*, 2021), an employee's emotional attachment to the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991), and continuance commitments (Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014), an employee's strong desire to retain as a member of the organisation (Turkyilmaz *et al.*, 2011), are the determinants of employee engagement.

Affective commitment and normative commitment, indicating an employee's emotional attachment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) and strong bond with the organisation (P. Ghosh *et al.*, 2016), reflective of employee engagement (Albrecht & Marty, 2020); P. Ghosh *et al.*, 2016; Gyensare *et al.*, 2017; K. Jiang *et al.*, 2015; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2017; Lee & Ok, 2016; Nazir & Islam, 2017; Vigoda-Gadot *et al.*, 2013; Yalabik *et al.*, 2015).

### ***Job resources and transformational leadership style (Purple cluster)***

The job resources are posited in the Job Demands Resource (JD-R) model. It provides the background for understanding the determinants and outcomes of work engagement (Bellamkonda *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, In some studies, training, employee participation, line manager support (Huo and Boxall, 2018), financial rewards, learning opportunities, decision authority, supervisor/co-worker support, and organisational support ("Miracle" Qi *et al.*, 2018) in general, and performance feedback (Sarti, 2014) as job resources determine the employee engagement (Sarti, 2014; Huo & Boxall, 2018). In other studies, goal clarity, trust in management (Bellamkonda *et al.*, 2021), skill utilisation, job feedback, supervisor support (Albrecht & Marty, 2020), job autonomy, employee development opportunities (Breevaart *et al.*, 2015; Albrecht & Marty, 2020) social support (Breevaart *et al.*, 2015) as job resources also determine the employee engagement. Staffing standardisation, work variety, and empowerment.

Instead, the high job demands are the stressors to reduce employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). To support this, the downsizing effects on employees cause reduced employee engagement. In such a case, employee engagement increases by providing more job resources, such as supervisor support and development opportunities (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Further, challenging job demands, hindrance job demands (Tadić *et al.*, 2015; Rai, 2018) lower employee engagement moderated by the provision of job resources (Tadić *et al.*, 2015; Rai, 2018; Balwant *et al.*, 2019).

Besides, the lower job demands as reduced Work-Family Conflict (Bellamkonda *et al.*, 2021) and leader-member exchange relationship quality (Agarwal *et al.*, 2012), determine employee engagement.

The transformational leadership style (Popli & Rizvi, 2015, 2017; Breevaart *et al.*, 2016; Gyensare *et al.*, 2017; Edelbroek *et al.*, 2019) is another determinant of employee engagement. It associates with different outcome variables such as psychological capital (Li *et al.*, 2020), job resources -(job control, access to information, supervisor support, innovative climate, work climate) (Balwant *et al.*, 2019), person-job fit (Bui *et al.*, 2017), job satisfaction (Myrden & Kelloway, 2015), autonomy and social support (Breevaart *et al.*, 2014) which in turn consequent in employee engagement.

### ***Sense of belongingness and trust (Light blue cluster)***

Organisational identification refers to employees' sense of belongingness in the organisation. It determines employee engagement (He *et al.*, 2014; Karanika-Murray *et al.*, 2015; Men *et al.*, 2020) through psychological empowerment (Srivastava & Singh, 2020). Instead, the organisational citizenship behaviour and turnover intention as outcomes of employee engagement are moderated by the organisational identifications.

The employees' trust, specifically the trust in senior management (Malinen *et al.*, 2013; Holland *et al.*, 2017), supervisors *et al.*, 2017; Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021), co-workers (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021), or the organisation as a whole (Srivastava & Madan, 2016; Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021) is a determinant for the employee engagement. Instead, trust in employers results from employee engagement (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Moreover, trust in organisations also moderates the fairness-employee engagement relationship (Abbas & Wu,

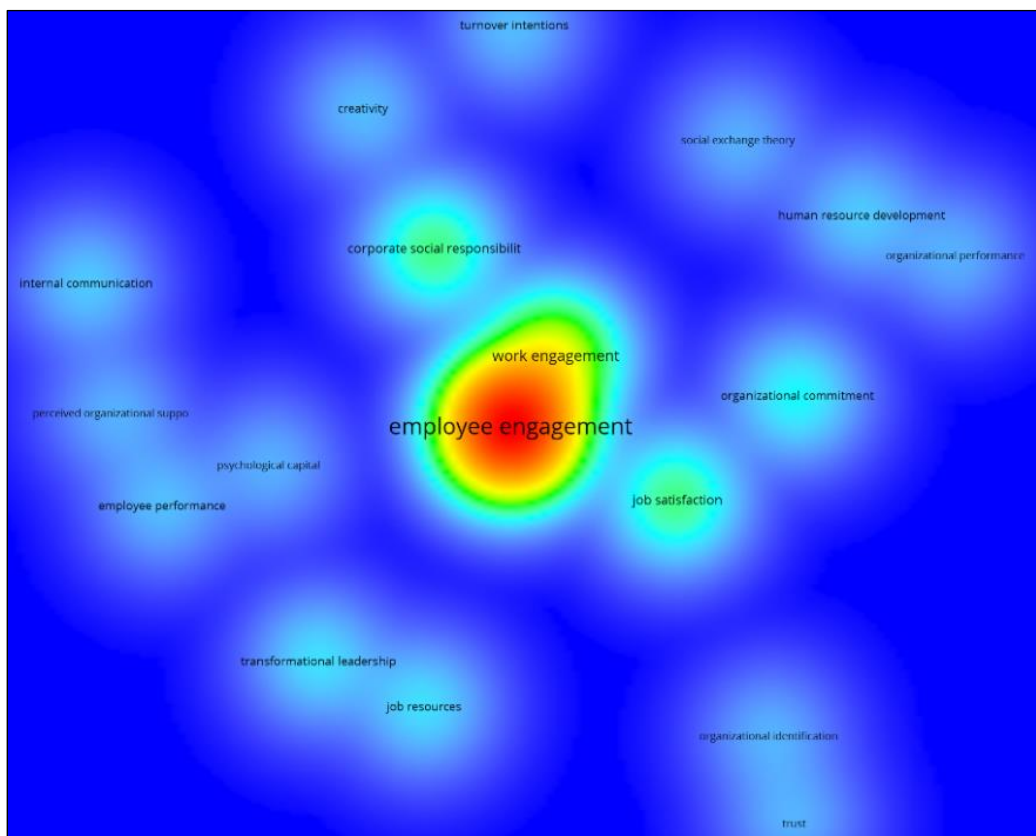
2018) and the employee engagement- organisation citizenship behaviour relationship (Srivastava & Madan, 2016).

### ***Opportunities for creativity (Orange cluster)***

Creativity determines employee engagement (Ghosh *et al.*, 2020). Instead, it has been tested as an outcome of employee engagement. (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2013; Demerouti *et al.*, 2015; Islam & Tariq, 2018; Chaudhary & Akhouri, 2019; Mansoor *et al.*, 2021).

### **Areas where empirical research lacks employee engagement**

This section addresses the second objective of the study. We used the density visualisation map derived from the keyword co-occurrence network visualisation to find areas where empirical research lacks employee engagement. The VOSviewer manual highlights that the nodes in the density visualisation map are displayed in red background when there is more research on that area. However, as Figure 8 shows, most keywords are denoted in the green background, indicating that they have been investigated in a few studies. Thus, even with the keywords with more than five occurrences reported, the employee engagement determinants and outcomes can be treated as insufficient for established knowledge. Therefore, the findings highlighted under the different themes above need further research.



**Figure 8:** Density visualisation of keyword co-occurrence  
Source: Review data (2023)

### **Reporting biases**

The PRISMA guidelines demanded that biases due to missing studies' results be assessed and reported. This task did not receive a systematic assessment. Instead, we used systematic and objective software techniques to avoid biases in reporting the results.

## DISCUSSION

The results of each article and synthesising those results were done in the section on “the common methods of promoting and outcomes of employee engagement”. The section outlined the determinants and outcomes of employee engagement. Since the first objective concerns the common methods for employee engagement, we can treat all the determinants as the common methods of promoting employee engagement. In section “areas where empirical research lacks employee engagement”, it was stated that those common methods and outcomes highlighted in section “the common methods of promoting and outcomes of employee engagement” were insufficient for established knowledge in the empirical research landscape. Moreover, concerning outcomes highlighted in section “the common methods of promoting and outcomes of employee engagement”, a few outcomes, such as employee performance, organisational performance, retention, job satisfaction, employer trust, and innovation, have been studied. There could be a lot more than that to be investigated empirically. If more outcomes could be found, that would help justify the importance of employee engagement.

Concerning themes, the first three themes, (1) organisational support, communication, psychological capital, (2) opportunities for learning and development, social exchange, (3) CSR activities implementation, clearly address the Job Demand Resource (JDR) theory, resource-based view, and the social exchange theory (SET). Moreover, the following four themes, (4) the development of job-related positive attitudes, (5) providing more job-related resources and use of a transformational leadership style, (6) making sense of belongingness and trust in employees, and (7) making opportunities for creativity, also represent the JDR, resource-based view, and the SET. The JDR (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984), and the SET (Emerson, 1976) address the fact that giving employees resources can make them more interested in their jobs. Thus, that results in employee engagement. It reveals that the themes found have a solid theoretical foundation.

Also, research on employee engagement points to strategic HRM and disruptive HRM in the fourth industrial revolution (Lee *et al.*, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018; Turner, 2020; Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2022; Priyashantha, 2023) as ways to improve employee engagement (Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2022b).

However, we did not find a study relating to those areas. Moreover, as highlighted by the JDR, modern technologies can act as job resources or reduce job demands leading to employee engagement (Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2022b). These indicate that there are still more untapped areas for employee engagement.

Despite these, society has evolved through different generations. The different generational types and employee engagement were not found in the current study. Specifically, the Z generation is coming to the labour force; the methods used to engage the X and Y generations may not fit the Z generation. Instead, we are in modern family structures where gender stereotypes have been changed (Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2022a). The social role theory postulates that new gender roles of both men and women result in employee engagement (Goffman, 1961; Biddle, 1986; Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2022b). Even though the argument was old and quite timely relevant, knowledge gaps available in empirical research.

Also, employee engagement is purely a psychological area subject to the possibility of changing the cognitive status of employees since the socio-technical environments are multifarious. Thus, the antecedents and outcomes possibly vary from time to time. Therefore, targeting all the areas prevalent in the literature for more research will help to update the knowledge on determinants and outcomes.

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## CONCLUSION

It is reported that employee engagement is currently in a crisis. The current study aimed to find; the (1) methods and outcomes scholars have empirically identified and (2) areas where empirical research lacks employee engagement. The methods of employee engagement will help find the solutions to that crisis. The articles

published during the 2008-2021 period were considered and retrieved from the Scopus database for the data set. We used the systematic literature review as the methodology, and PRISMA guidelines were followed in selecting the articles and reporting the findings.

We found seven themes relating to methods and outcomes of employee engagement empirically investigated. They include (1) organisational support, communication, psychological capital, (2) opportunities for learning and development, social exchange, (3) CSR activities implementation, (4) development of job-related positive attitudes, (5) providing more job-related resources, and use of transformational leadership style, (6) making sense of belongingness and trust in employees and (7) making opportunities for creativity. From these themes, several common methods to get employees engaged were found. Some of them are the initiatives for human resource development, perceived organisational support, organisational culture, internal communication, and psychological capital. Employee engagement can also be increased through corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, job-related positive attitudes (such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment), job resources, a transformational leadership style, a sense of belonging, trust, and opportunities for creativity.

Moreover, the outcomes of employee engagement include increased employee and organisational performance, affective and normative commitment, employee retention, job satisfaction, trust toward employers, and creativity.

### **Implications for theory practicality and future research**

Concerning the findings' implication to theory, theories such as JDR, resource-based view, and Social Exchange Theory (SET) can be validated through these findings. The hypotheses can be developed for the relationships between the found themes and employee engagement as the relationships were derived from empirical findings. The seven themes include new knowledge, getting employees involved, and adding to the body of knowledge. The methods and outcomes derived from the seven themes can also be used to make a conceptual model. A hypothesis can be made for each method and the outcome of employee engagement as they were derived from empirical investigations. Thus, the conceptual model can be tested in the real world, and the areas representing the keywords clustered in each theme (section on 'the common methods of promoting and outcomes of employee engagement') can be used to create measurement tools for each theme.

All empirical investigations conducted between 2008 and 2021 have been compiled into seven themes that drive employee engagement, allowing for a more straightforward practical application of the findings. Thus, practitioners can use them to engage employees more in their work. These findings may be more helpful in reducing the employee engagement crisis reported by Gallup (2021).

As Figure 8 shows, there is little research on its methods and outcomes, although much research is available on employee engagement or work engagement. Therefore, the findings highlighted under the different themes in (section on 'the common methods of promoting and outcomes of employee engagement') need further research. Specifically, the methods and the outcomes highlighted in this research need to be further researched for established knowledge of those methods and outcomes. Moreover, other outcomes of employee engagement to the organisation and the employee must be targeted to research.

The literature states that different areas, such as strategic HRM and disruptive HRM in the fourth industrial revolution (Lee *et al.*, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018; Turner, 2020), can enhance employee engagement. Thus, strategic HRM factors and more modern technological resources like disruptive HRM-related factors influencing employee engagement must be researched (Priyashantha, De Alwis, and Welmilla, 2022b).

Despite these, society has evolved through different generations. Generational influences on employee engagement need future research. The knowledge of employee engagement in modern family structures, like

changes in gender stereotypes (Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2020; Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2021a; 2021b) and how they affect employee engagement (Priyashantha, De Alwis and Welmilla, 2022) can be researched. Also, employee engagement is purely a psychological area subject to the possibility of changing the cognitive status of employees since the socio-technical environments are multifarious. Therefore, the antecedents and outcomes possibly vary from time to time; hence, more research is needed on the subject we investigated.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Gendered state: ‘Governmentality’ and the labour migration policy of Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** Governments’ use of their authority to control the behaviour of the citizens through ‘mechanisms of management’ such as education, laws, rules, and regulations is discussed widely in Michael Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’. Built on this standing, this paper intends to investigate how the government of Sri Lanka uses different policy initiatives over time to control the behaviour of a categorized group of its citizens i.e., unskilled female migrant workers. The research analyses the labour migration policies implemented by successive governments of Sri Lanka since late 1970s to post COVID-19 period to examine this statement. It argues that the government re-produces traditional gender norms through laws and regulations to regulate the movements of unskilled female migrant workers aiming to achieve its policy interests. The paper also discusses how the most recent labour migration policy controls women’s right to migration by interpreting the aspects of ‘Family Background Report’. This study adopts a combined method; while reviewing secondary data i.e., laws, regulations, and existing literature on related areas be the main source of data for the study, findings will be complemented by empirical data collected through structured interviews with government officials. This research concludes by revealing how the government of Sri Lanka has utilized its ‘mechanisms of management’ to control the right to work of a selected segment of females by applying its authority. It further explains how these laws and regulations have been changed over time to cater the policy interests of the succeeding governments.

**Keywords:** Governmentality, Migration Policy, gender norms, unskilled female domestic workers, Family Background Report.

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern state structure, the government often assumes an apex position and uses this position to shape and reshape the conduct of the people under its authority through a range of calculated interventions. Some of the intervening mechanisms are direct, such as rules and regulations and some are indirect, which include *inter alia* educating desires/aspirations, configuring habits and re-enforcing beliefs of the population (Li, 2007). The core focus of these interventions, as Foucault underlined in his concept of ‘governmentality’, is mainly to reach the government endorsed goals of securing “welfare of the population and to improving its condition” (Burchell *et al.*, 1991: p. 100). Governments often utilize the operational practice of classification of individuals, which is mostly done based on socioeconomic norms and demarcations such as race, religion, profession, income level, ethnicity etc. (Huff, n.d.), and selectively make disciplinary interventions to achieve their larger goals.

In June 2013, the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) changed its labour migration policy through a series of circulars (starting from circular 13/2013) issued by the government’s specialized agency on labour migration, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment. These circulars included a set of restrictions targeting the females who are migrating under the ‘unskilled’ i.e., domestic and care worker category. The new regulations imposed a mandatory prerequisite of producing a ‘Family Background Report’ and obtaining the government’s approval to migrate for the females who migrate under this category.

The regulation was only applicable to the female workers who migrate to Gulf countries at the initial stage, but later expanded to all female unskilled migrant workers irrespective of their country of destination. Despite heavy criticism leveled by scholars, human rights activists, and UN officials, who interpreted the new circulars as a violation of women’s right to work, the government continued to emphasize the importance and the necessity of implementing these regulations as they were intended to ensure social stability, by highlighting the protection

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of under-aged children and family members of the migrating females (Sri Lanka, Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, 2008).

This article aims to discern the above action of the government as an instance of using its power over a classified group, i.e., unskilled female migrant workers to control their behaviour by using its 'mechanisms of management'. Within this context, this study attempts to answer the research question as to how government intervened in individual decision-making (to control their behaviour) of a classified group of people to reach the interest/s of the state. The author will take theoretical backing from Michael Foucault's concept of governmentality for this analysis.

The arguments of this paper are twofold: first, it is argued that the government has strategically utilised its 'mechanisms of management' to regulate the behaviour of unskilled female migrant workers which were largely shaped by the economic interests (or financial priorities) of the state. The policy changes of successive governments in the past four decades are examined for this purpose. Then, it is argued that the government executes this social control by re-establishing gender norms in society, particularly by highlighting appealing terms such as the 'role of mother' for the wellbeing of the family.

Even though many studies have investigated different aspects of the new labour migration law implemented by the GoSL, there are no researches conducted to examine this phenomenon as an instance of controlling the behaviour of its citizens, i.e., the migrant women. This paper intends to fill this research gap and contribute to the literature by revealing how the concept of 'governmentality' could explain the conduct of migration policies formulated and executed by the GoSL as a means of controlling the behaviour of female labour migrants.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section provides an introduction to the development of female labour migration in Sri Lanka. The second section elucidates the first argument of this paper: how the succeeding governments since late 1970s have changed their migration policies to control potential female migrant's behaviour to cater the interests of the state, which is more revenue-driven than that of social welfare. The author examine the 'thinking' of the government which is explicated as 'rationales for intervention' where both formal and informal measures were applied. The third section in detail discusses the gendered impact of this process, particularly on the labour migration policy. This section is focused on the government's thinking on gender and how the power has been manipulated to implant gender norms in society to control a certain group.

### **Theoretical framework**

Foucault, in his analysis of the development of the state system, politics, and power relations since the feudal period, provides an interpretation of the exerting power by the governments over its citizens. To him, governments assume responsibility for the life process of the citizens under their rule and for that purpose, they utilize "methods of power and knowledge to control and modify them" (Foucault, 1978: p. 142). Foucault uses the term 'governmentality' or how 'one conducts the conduct of people' to seek the government's rationality in engaging in this process. According to him, the ultimate goal of any government is to ensure and secure the "welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, et cetera" (Burchell *et al.*, 1991: p. 100).

The term 'governmentality' combines the two concepts 'government' and 'rationality'. According to Foucault, the term 'government' stands for the conduct or shaping of people's behaviour (through detailed supervision) with the expectation of leading them towards 'self-governance'. In technical terms, he defines this as bio-politics. 'Rationality' is the process of conducting people systematically to achieve this expectation. Governments practice 'rationality' through calculated, reasonable interventions to conduct (or shape) the behaviour of citizens when necessary (Senellart *et al.*, 2008). For example, he points out the institutions such as

schools, prisons, and hospitals where the citizens are trained to be disciplined and measures such as taxation and laws where the citizens are required to oblige.

However, given that this ‘power’ is being operated from a distance and not in direct hierarchical means, the subjects (citizens) are not necessarily aware of this ‘conduct of the conduct’ and why it is being done (Li, 2007). Therefore, the consent of the citizens is not required but are expected to practice those voluntarily. As Dean (2010) points out, the notion of the “mentality” (or the thinking process) of government involves in the course of developing a ‘practice’ (by the government) is often taken for granted and not often questioned by its practitioners i.e., the citizens (p.16). In Foucault’s words, his theory of ‘governmentality’ is “the way in which one conducts the conduct of men” and not going beyond this “proposed analytical grid for these relations of power” (Senellart *et al.*, 2008: p. 186).

Foucault here attempts to re-organize the concept of power which is generally practised by the state through a direct hierarchical approach. Instead, he focuses on how governments enforce their authority indirectly (or distinctly) through social control, i.e., by educating desires and configuring habits, norms, and beliefs, but not enforcing coercive power to control citizens. To make this process easier, the state defines/categorizes its citizens based on certain characteristics such as profession, income, gender, age and race, based on which the state implements/exercises different tools, or ‘mechanisms or management’ according to Foucault, as corrective interventions.

This study deploys these analytical guides proposed by Foucault to interpret the Sri Lankan government’s broad thinking behind the control of the conduct of a segment of its citizens i.e., female domestic migrant workers.

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## METHODOLOGY

This explanatory research adopted a combined methodology. The key intention of the study is to examine and interpret government laws and regulations to analyse selected policies within the concept of ‘governmentality’. The main source of data utilised for this research was secondary data. The author reviewed existing literature on labour migration as well as on the concept of ‘governmentality’ while supporting those with the data collected from the reports issued by government institutions such as the Department of Census and Statistics, Foreign Employment Bureau and the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare. Thus, information extracted from the reports published by international organisations such as United Nations, International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) was also applied throughout the discussion.

This study also employed empirical data collected from a structured interview using the purposive sampling method to support the research argument. Officials of the Foreign Employment Bureau were interviewed to clarify the motivation for the implementation of these regulations with the purpose of understanding the government’s rationale on the same and to clarify the recent alternatives made to the regulations.

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## BACKGROUND

Unskilled labour migration is a significant feature of the Sri Lankan economy. A considerable number of male and female workers migrate predominantly to Gulf countries under the unskilled labour category to cater to the high demand in fields such as construction, domestic, and care work. Push factors such as chronic poverty, lack of occupational opportunities with satisfactory income levels and inequality in intra-regional socio-economic opportunities have contributed to creating this migration boom in Sri Lanka (Hettige, 2012; Siriwardhana *et al.*, 2015; International Labour Organization, 2017). It is also noteworthy that the government encouraged the

migration process at its inception, intending to reduce poverty and unemployment among youth (Jayawardena, 2004).

A significant feature of Sri Lankan unskilled labour migration is its constant dominance by females who migrated as ‘domestic and care workers’ to the countries of the Middle East. This trend lasted until the early 2000s when government implement restrictions to discourage it. At its peak period, a high proportion of female workers i.e., more than 70% per cent in the 1990s (1992 – 72 %, 1993 -75 %, 1995 – 73.3 %, 1996 - 73.4 %, 1997 - 75.1%) left the country as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar and elsewhere in the world (Sri Lanka, Foreign Employment Bureau, 2020b).

While poverty remains the primary push factor that motivates these women to migrate (Gamburd, 2010, 2020; Djafar & Hassan, 2012; Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014; Weeraratne, 2014, 2018), the ability to earn a substantially better income at the destination country for the same unpaid reproductive work they carried out in home country remains the main pull factor (Gamburd, 2010; Siriwardhana *et al.*, 2015). The ability to earn a better income and support their families also elevated the social status of these women from being ‘housewives’ to the ‘breadwinners’ of the family (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004; Shamim, 2006).

However, despite their positive financial contribution towards family and to the development of the country through remittances, the negative impact of mother’s migration towards left behind family members was a concern of the government since the early 2000s which led them to implement direct and indirect restrictions to limit female migrants. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs have consistently underlined these negative impacts of mothers’ migration, especially on young children (Ukwatta, 2010).

This concern was also characterized in the first-ever ‘National Labour Migration Policy’ of Sri Lanka adopted by the government in 2008. Although the new policy recognises the contribution of female unskilled migrant workers, in this policy paper, the government underlines the importance of promoting skilled workers/professional migration while discouraging the low-skilled and low remittance-making occupations (Sri Lanka, Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, 2008: p. 20).

The policy further frames ‘low-skilled workers’ as a specific category that is more ‘vulnerable’ to the violation of their rights, and prone to harassment and abuses at their destination countries. Interestingly, the reason for this group’s ‘vulnerability’ is attributed to their job categorization as ‘low-skilled workers’ (UN, 2015: p. 20), but the real reasons behind this group’s vulnerable state, including abject poverty, inability to access livelihood at home country or the conditions that they had to face in destination country have not been considered. Hence, the conceptualisation and identification of migrant workers who are engaged in unskilled labour and their families as a category that requires the government’s assistance can be seen in the ‘National Labour Migration Policy’ (UN, 2015).

Through the point of view of ‘governmentality’, this action could be viewed as “corrective interventions” made on a sub-group and steps taken to ‘discipline’ them, to which Foucault referred to as a “specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as an instrument of its exercise” (Foucault, 1995: p. 170). The government takes the first step to identify and classify the ‘unskilled female migrant workers’ as an explicit group, based on their profession and gender and separates them from other citizens. Secondly, the government identifies that this category requires ‘concerted interventions’ to regulate their behaviour. Thirdly, the government introduces new regulations (a mechanism of management) to regulate their behaviour and the concerned group is obliged to follow them.

The first visible (and formal) intervention by the government focusing on placing regulations on unskilled female migrant workers starts in 2013. Two main circulars: circular ‘13/2013’ and circular ‘MFE/RAD/01/03’ of 2013 issued by the Foreign Employment Bureau of Sri Lanka (SLBFE) sets two main restrictions. First, setting a

minimum and maximum age limit<sup>1</sup> (21 – 55) for migration; second, it banned the migration of mothers with children under the age of five years. It further requested ‘to guarantee the protection’ of children above the age of five by providing the details of a substitute caregiver, and the approval of a guardian of the woman explicitly stating that ‘she is allowed to migrate’.

The circulars also introduce a mechanism to verify the above conditionalities, with a submission of a ‘Family Background Report’. As interpreted by the government, this is a “mandatory requirement of obtaining clearing certificate for domestic sector female workers preventing *unqualified* domestic housekeepers going abroad” (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 2013: p. 2). This clearly demonstrates how the GoSL initiated to ‘conduct the conduct’ of this classified group of the citizens where it identified as its intervention is required. The government here takes the authority to decide ‘who is qualified to migrate and who is not’. Interestingly, the condition to be qualified as a migrant worker is determined based upon the traditional gender roles assigned to females by society (i.e., taking care of children and family members) but not based on their skills or level of education.

The establishment of these circulars was the first direct step of the government to intervene/control the segment of women who are opting to be female domestic migrant workers by altering the right to choose their preferred occupation. This situation can be interpreted as an example of the point highlighted by Piper (2004) and Spaan & Naerssen (2017), where the right to migrate as labour workers of economically vulnerable communities are controlled by the interest of the ruling elites. However, the findings of Piper (2004) and Spaan & Naerssen (2017) contrast with Foucault’s explanation of the role of the government: according to him, the ultimate expectation of any government intervention is to ensure the welfare of its citizens. However, within the context of this study, the government’s interventions did not ensure the welfare of these potential female migrant workers who do not have access to a stable income in their home country, and migration may be the only possible option for them to ensure a sustainable livelihood.

Hence, the following sections attempt to identify and explain how the GoSL rationalises the concepts in ‘governmentality’ to achieve the broader expectations of the state which are based on macro-economic necessities rather than to guarantee the welfare of the potential female migrant workers. It further explains how gender norms have deliberately been exploited to justify these interventions as well as their impact.

### **State’s intervention in migration policies based on its revenue objectives**

This section intends to analyse the main argument of this study i.e., how succeeding governments have changed their policy on labour migration (to encourage or discourage female migrant workers) to reach the government’s policy interests, particularly economic. It is important to recall that remittances are one of the major sources of foreign income for Sri Lanka’s economy. Thus, the highest portion of remittances is being transmitted by female migrant workers in Middle East countries ( Sri Lanka, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018).

Therefore, controlling their movements is directly connected to the country’s economy. On the other hand, the classification of ‘unskilled female migrant workers’ makes it easier for the government to control them straightforwardly, by deviating them from the other group of migrants and female employees. It is noteworthy that these women workers are economically vulnerable, relatively less educated, and are not aware of their rights which makes it less complicated for the government to regulate their behaviour in comparison to the other categories i.e., females of the educated middle class.

Thus, the measures taken by the government are exhibited as appealing, protective measures which were implemented for the betterment of migrant workers and their family members and were supported by the general public of the country. These situations eventually lead the females to accept the ‘mechanisms of managements’ implemented by the state voluntarily, without challenging or questioning their rights. The findings of this section



also conform to Foucault's interpretation of state's power: where 'power' only exists if it is exercised on others, and in this case, on the female migrant workers (Foucault, 1978).

In this section, the author examines the labour migration policies of the succeeding Sri Lankan governments from 1977 to 2021 by categorizing them into three different periods based on the changes in policies.

### ***The first phase (early 1977 to 2008)***

Since the adoption of liberal economic policies by the government of Sri Lanka in 1977 (Herring, 1987), inward foreign currency remittances became an integral part of the country's economy and development agenda (Sriskandarajah, 2002). Despite having an educated population as a result of the free education policy of the country, a predominant number of these labour migrants were unskilled workers who migrated for temporary work in Gulf countries (Shah, 2004; Piper, 2008). The economic liberalization policies implemented by the government of Sri Lanka coupled with the reduction of travel restrictions in the late 1970s led more unemployed youth to migrate as unskilled workers to Gulf countries (Kelegama, 2004; Gamburd, 2010, 2013; Weeraratne, 2014; Siriwardhana *et al.*, 2015).

With the high demand arose within Gulf countries for domestic and care work, more unemployed young females from Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, identified migration as the best option to overcome poverty and support their families which resulted in the feminization of unskilled labour migration in the country (UN, 2015). More women from both urban and rural areas of Sri Lanka migrated to Gulf countries as domestic workers (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004; Tayah, 2016) as it was seen as the only plausible option for them to earn a higher wage.

While appreciating the massive contribution of female migrant workers to the country's economy through remittances, successive governments encouraged female worker migration while accepting the feminisation of labour migration positively (Benería *et al.*, 2012). Another reason for this move, as Siddique (2005) explains, is the inability of sending male migrant workers due to the unavailability of opportunities in the construction sector as it was already dominated by male workers from other South Asian countries.

The government established the 'Foreign Employment Bureau' in 1985 to regularize labour migration as well as to add value to it as an accepted source of employment and foreign exchange. The social image of the female migrants was also augmented by using government-controlled media identifying them as *foreign-exchange earning heroes (Rata Viru)*, a term which rhymes with the Sinhalese term used to appreciate the soldiers who protect the country (*Rana Viru*). The government also introduced several incentives to migrant workers, including the establishment of 'Labour Welfare Sections' at Sri Lankan embassies in labour-receiving countries. As a result, Sri Lanka became the only South Asian country with a dominant female migrant flow to Gulf countries (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012).

The formal and informal measures taken by the successive governments to promote labour migration during this period reveal how the governments have successfully utilised its 'mechanisms of managements' to make calculated interventions to control the flow of this group of female migrant workers. The rationale behind exercising these interventions is to expand both the micro and macro-level economic growth of the country<sup>2</sup>, which will ultimately benefit the welfare of all its citizens.

In addition to regulating the behaviour of female migrant workers by establishing a formal institution to support their potential careers, the government also used its authority to create a positive image towards these workers (among general public of the country) by utilizing the media effectively. In line with the argument by Foucault, neither the female workers nor the citizens of the country could recognise that they are being controlled

by the state. This system worked properly until the early 2000s, particularly given that this system was complementary for both state and migrant women.

Though lucrative to the country, this mass female migration flow also created two negatives. First, the country was identified as a supplier of cheap unskilled labour; second, considerable social resistance arose against sending female migrant workers due to the reported abuses and harassment faced by women in destination countries. While identifying this instance required another intervention by the state, the first-ever labour migrating law was adopted by the government on June 2013 through SLBFE circular 13/2013. The above two reasons made a compelling impact on the government's policy on migration, particularly on the unskilled female migrant workers where the government implements semi-restrictions to discourage females from migrating mainly as domestic and care workers.

### *The second phase (2008 to 2020)*

The adoption of the National Labour Migration Law of Sri Lanka in 2008 signifies a clear policy shift in migration-related decisions, laws, and regulations of the government. The policy deviates from the government's orientation of 'migration for skills and development' to remittance maximization. Under these new policies, skilled worker migration was promoted, and migration of low-skilled, low-remittance-making occupations such as female domestic workers was discouraged by implementing both direct and indirect restrictions. The government here again classifies two groups i.e., skilled, and unskilled workers based on their profession and income level. Thus, the rationale behind this intervention was to reach two goals: to address the mounting social pressure against the government due to harassment faced by female migrant workers in destination countries and maximizing remittances by sending more skilled workers. The migration policy of 2013 (establishment of the 'Family Background Report') is a direct measure taken by the government to limit unskilled female labour migration.

The execution of a Sri Lankan under-aged housemaid by Saudi Authorities in January 2013 made the government rush to adopt a new migration policy, (Abeyasekera & Jayasundere, 2015; UN, 2015; Weeraratne, 2016; Gamburd, 2020), which was largely confined to political rhetoric until then. It can be assumed that this intervention to demotivate female migrants is a rather protective measure taken by the government to protect itself from being criticized by the public rather than protecting female migrant workers as such. It is noteworthy that this policy adoption was not a result of social research, parliamentary debate or a consultation process with the stakeholders (Abeyasekera & Jayasundere, 2015).

The government, based on some of the assumptions and generalized social ideologies stemming from gendered constructs, developed the 2013 migration policy. It is also interesting to underline that government did not cite the abuses and harassment faced by women in destination countries as a reason to enforce this restrictive policy, but they put the onus on the migrant workers for creating a situation which made them a problem to the government in particular and to the society in general (Somarathna, 2011). Hence, interpreting the implementation of this policy as a measure taken to ensure social welfare i.e., the fundamental responsibility of any government, as pointed out by Foucault. The gendered aspect of this intervention is discussed in detail in the third section of this paper.

Siddiqui's (2008) study, also provides another clue for the government's this rather bold decision. He points out that the second boom of the construction field in the Gulf region (which took place in the early 2000s) encouraged Sri Lankan government to send more male migrant workers to Gulf countries by implementing restrictions to discourage female migrants. As noted earlier, despite the government's overt intention to discourage 'unskilled labour migration', no restrictions were implemented to limit unskilled male migration. This action also reveals another covert motivation in bringing the 2013 labour policy: quelling the social pressure mounting against the government on the safety of female migrant workers and indirectly encouraging male

unskilled labour migration to Gulf countries, replacing females. Consequently, the number of male migrants to Gulf countries increased starting from 2008 and marked 65.64% in 2017 (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 2017).

Given this, the restrictions implemented by the government to discourage female migrant workers did not negatively affect the macro economy of the country<sup>3</sup>, but possibly at the micro-level. Despite that the rationale of government interventions has to focus on enhancing social welfare, this new regulation restricted the most promising livelihood opportunity for a significant number of females which resulted in increasing poverty among them (Sooriyagoda, 2015; Weeraratne, 2016; Gamburd, 2020) which provides space to re-think the success of this intervention.

Moving this discussion further, the following section intends to discuss how does government alter their 'mechanisms of management' to cope with the realities that occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *The third phase (2021 onwards)*

Sri Lanka is among many other countries that are severely affected due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A significant number of migrant workers returned to the country due to losing their occupations in the destination countries. This had a significant impact on the country's foreign exchange earnings. Besides, in 2020 only 53,835 migrant workers (21,286 females) left the country (Sri Lanka, Foreign Employment Bureau, 2020b). In a situation where other foreign exchange earning avenues such as tourism and textile exports could not swiftly rebound, the government decided to encourage labour migration by setting a target of sending 100,000 migrant workers abroad by December 2021 (Ruth, 2021).

This demarcates the third calculated intervention imposed by the state targeting the classified group of migrant workers. However, the expected outcome is still to stabilize the macro economy of the country which was severely affected by the global pandemic. Although the expectation of the government could be identified as ensuring the welfare of all citizens, it is interesting that only a certain group of citizens (who are crucial yet easy to control) are being targeted through an effective change of policies. It can be assumed that the government, in all these three phases, have successfully identified and effectively exploited the vulnerability of this particular group of 'potential female migrant workers' to satisfy its macro-economic interests.

One of the steps taken in this regard was softening its 2013 migration circulars and allowing prospective females to provide a self-declaration in a form of an affidavit entailing the FBR requirements by circulars FL/02/08 of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and FL/02/44 of 05<sup>th</sup> October 2021. These circulars also lifted the need to present a FBR for the female migrant workers who had returned to Sri Lanka from 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. This action led to a boost in females leaving the country. One of the officials of the Foreign Employment Bureau of Sri Lanka revealed that:

“... the Government approves all these steps only because they need more remittances as foreign reserves are declining due to the effect of Covid 19 pandemic. But we are not going to repeal the law... we have observed an increase in female housemaids leaving the country since October 2021.”

The apparent turn of ideals of fulfilling social needs, such as securing the family and children's safety, which were presented as the motivation of the 2013 migration circular, indicates the changeable affectation of the government whose prime motivation could be interpreted as economic rather than social welfare. Although one can argue that the government made a calculated intervention in a certain group of citizens by targeting to secure the welfare of all its citizens, this does not justify the rationale highlighted by the government during the second stage of its interventions where they strictly highlighted the welfare of left-behind children and families of migrant workers. Thus, there is no guarantee of the safety of these workers in the destination countries. This new

establishment is against the government's strong discouragement of female domestic workers which was implemented through the 2013 migration law. Even though it is still early to observe the outcomes of this decision, this is a clear indication that underscores the government's prioritising of foreign exchange requirements rather than the well-being of female domestic workers.

This section examined the changes in the migration policy over the period from 1977 to 2021 and the findings of this section support the argument that the government of Sri Lanka exercised its power distinctively to control the behaviour of female migrant workers to accomplish its broader economic expectations. It further explains how the government takes individuals (the subjects of sovereignty), and uses its forces and capacities "as a resource to be fostered, to be used and to be optimized" (Dean, 2010: p. 20) to meet the ends of government as they deem appropriate. This individual and group formation, with capacities and possibilities, is a part of the system of governing. In this process, the government either newly produces or re-produces existing norm sets that they deem appropriate which enables them to govern each category of people. The next part of this paper focuses on how GoSL re-produced and embedded traditional gender norms in society to make its intervention more convincing to the citizens.

### **Government's rationale of intervention and its gendered impact**

This section continues to analyse how the government successfully applied traditional gender norms to justify its intervention to control the behaviour of potential female migrant workers, particularly during the second phase where it had to address the social pressure. The migration policy (particularly the FBR) could be viewed as an overt intervention made by the government aiming at women, mainly with children, as a part of an overarching policy mooted by the officials to ban females from leaving as domestic labour workers as well as to minimize the social costs induced by female migration. Thus, taking steps to discourage unskilled female labour migration, as a solution to address the issues faced by the female migrant workers in their destination countries, was emanated from the level of the President of Sri Lanka (Aneez, 2016; Ada Derana, 2019; Colombo Page, 2019). It can also be assumed that this decision has also been influenced by the negative image of the international community towards Sri Lanka as the only South Asian country with a dominant (unskilled) female labour flow to Gulf countries (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012).

The submission of a 'Family Background Report' was formally introduced by the GoSL in June 2013 as a part of its 'National Labour Migration Policy' followed by the policy framework on 'Decent work for all'. This could be interpreted as a successful and convincing step taken by the government to address the rising social pressure against sending females as domestic workers to Gulf countries rather than imposing a total ban as conducted by the governments of Nepal and the Philippines in similar circumstances. This signifies the government's acknowledgement of the importance of remittances in the country's economy rather than the welfare of the female migrants despite the narrative used to implement the policy.

According to Foucault, governments expect eventual 'self-governance or self-discipline' of their citizens. Within this context, it can be assumed that the GoSL also expected a 'natural death' of this trend i.e., a gradual decrease in the number of females who intend to migrate as domestic and care workers, without imposing a total ban. The most effective and convincing approach to implant this aspect within society was to highlight the 'role of the mother', a traditional gender norm that is being accepted by the citizens without questioning. This could be observed as an extension of what De Alwis (2002) explains as women, including their bodies, belief and behaviour pattern has been identified as the "repositories and signifiers" of the Sri Lankan culture and tradition since the colonial era (p. 675). The concept of 'womanhood' is significant and embedded in the concept of 'family' as an integral part of it where the primary responsibility of a woman is interpreted as to provide care and to protect her family. The traditional interpretation of the role of the mother also stems from the "gendered moral rationalities" (Duncan & Edwards, 1997:30).

In Sri Lankan society, the collective social understanding about what is ‘morally right’, and ‘socially acceptable’ way of motherhood is built upon this traditional role of the woman who prioritises her family and children. Accordingly, the policy underlines that the priority of women in general, including migrant workers is to remain within this traditional role of being the ‘woman’ and the ‘mother’ within the confines of the status of ‘good mother’, whose main responsibility is child-rearing and caring for the family (UN, 2015: p. 25). The government’s keenness to work within these social ideologies rather than intervening and making compromises on the gendered social constructs has become a part of the process of placing gendered norms of the society through this policy.

However, the push factors that motivate females to migrate seem more powerful. Several studies (Siriwardhane & De Silva, 2015; Weeraratne, 2018) have concluded that a female’s decision to migrate is always backed by several compelling reasons: attempt to break off from poverty and to enhance her family’s economic status to find temporary relief from a dysfunctional relationship. In most cases, migration is the only option available for some of the females to effectively address these needs. In a situation where a woman could not fulfil the obligations of the FBR, including in instances of difficulty in obtaining spousal consent, she could be looking at other options, either to influence the FBR approval or to migrate circumventing the FBR process.

Weeraratne (2018) through her empirical study has pointed out that the implementation of FBR has significantly increased the number of females who migrate by using illegal measures to major labour-receiving Gulf countries. Not only this situation makes these women more vulnerable in the destination countries but also deprives the right of the workers and their family members benefitting from the welfare schemes provided by the SLBFE. Within this context, it is questionable how calculated the government’s decision to impose restrictions and is certain that there has not been any research conducted on the possible negative outcome of it.

The FBR requirement certainly hinders occupational opportunities and choices of females, who are otherwise not active in the domestic labour force, as evident in statistics that 72.3 % of first-time female migrants have not previously engaged in any remunerated occupation (Ukwatta, 2013). In addition to aggravating the vulnerabilities among this classified group of females, the 2013 labour regulations overtly go against the government’s own commitment to guarantee equal opportunities for both men and women and to enhance gender equality, as stated in the ‘National Labour Migration Policy’ of 2008.

These underlying social ideologies are also indicative of the government’s relaxed policy on male migration, where there is neither a need for the fathers of young children to submit a FBR prior to migration nor they need to obtain their spouses’ explicit permission. As men as young as 18 are allowed to migrate, there is no formal mechanism in place to discourage or stop man leaving the country, unless an interested party obtains a restraining court order.

The government’s thinking on male migration is much relaxed and not tagged to the family and children’s welfare. This is revealed in the government’s response to the joint allegation letter sent by the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants condemning the ‘Family Background Report’ for its direct discrimination against women. The response states “... compared to maternal absence, paternal absences are not unusual or rare in the life of Sri Lankan children and they are comparatively less disruptive” ( Sri Lanka, Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, 2014: p. 10). This statement reveals the government’s thinking and definition on the gender roles assigned to the husband and the wife within the context of family. In addition to reinforcing gender stereotypes through regulations, the government justifies it by re-establishing the responsibility of childcaring and rearing solidly as a mother’s duty.

Despite that the reason behind this intervention is patently an issue regarding the safety of the migrant workers overseas as well as curbing the illegal trafficking of women for work, this point was never cited as a reason to establish these restrictions. The government took advantage of the spur of the incident and the

widespread public outcry on the social negativities of female migration (Weeraratne, 2018, 2021) to bring out a policy which is remotely related to the security of female migrant workers.

The rationale provided in Circular 13/2013 of June 2013 for imposing these restrictions is cited as “... that considerable number of female domestic housekeepers leaving the country without informing the actual state of affairs at home” (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 2013: p. 2). The government here categorically discriminates and classifies prospective migrant women in a negative form which implies that they have to reveal the ‘actual situation’ to the government as their behaviour is “untrustworthy” (UN, 2015: p. 23). Hence, government’s intervention is needed to discipline or regulate them which were imposed through the SLBFE circulars mentioned above. This also demonstrates that this certain group is deprived of the freedom exercised by other groups of migrant workers who are not required to reveal their personal information to the government.

Despite its intention to protect the family institution, it is questionable why women should reveal their ‘actual status’ to the government? (Abeyasekera & Jayasundere, 2015), simply because they are ‘unskilled’ and ‘female’ workers. This same regulation does not apply to any other migrant groups including male workers who migrate under the ‘unskilled’ category. This situation reveals the power relations exercised by the government on female migrant workers as against male migrant workers: while the classification of gender plays a significant role, their vulnerabilities (such as poverty and lack of awareness of their rights) make females an easy target to for the government to exercise its power over them in comparison to male migrant workers.

It can be assumed that the government successfully exploited the vulnerabilities of this certain group of females, especially in the first and third phases mentioned in the above section. Particularly having understood that this certain group is ‘ready to migrate’ at any given time as their push factors are more influential. It is also interesting that although the controlling of behaviour by the government is obviously visible during the second phase (i.e., FBR), the encouragement to migrate (in the first and third phases) is not clearly visible. Yet definitely a means of informal way of control by exploiting their vulnerabilities.

The amendment made in 2015 (to the circular 13/2013) tightens this law further by targeting another group of individuals: the new circular demands the approval of the ‘estate superintendent’<sup>4</sup> (in addition to the other requirements) for the prospective female migrant workers in plantation sector if they wish to migrate as labour workers, which explained by Jegathesan (2019) as a new form of colonialism implemented by the government of Sri Lanka. Targeting women in the plantation sector again proves the fact that the government is exercising its power on the most vulnerable communities of the country. These selected classifications (of citizens) are interesting as the state always identifies and targets the groups who are not capable to challenge the government’s decisions. This again demonstrates the unequal power relations that exist in Sri Lankan society and how those inequalities have effectively been exercised by the government to control citizens, when necessary. This situation explains how and why the government needs to classify citizens based on different demarcations to make the governing process easier.

The government here identifies itself as the entity that has the sole authority to decide ‘who should work? when to work? and where to work?’. Interestingly, the factor that decides whether women are ‘qualified to migrate’ is their traditional reproductive responsibilities. In the cases where women cannot satisfactorily cater to the government’s requirements, they are forced back to complete their assigned (traditional) reproductive role disregarding their right to work or to choose a job of preference. The government here plays a patriarchal role not only by implanting gendered norms within the society but also by identifying the government as the sole entity that has the power to control the decision-making power of prospective female migrant workers.

While putting this context within the rationale of the ‘governmentality’, the FBR reveals how the government has categorized a group of citizens based on its power relations, and what tools must be used to control them. For example, the husband, the estate superintendent, and the government take decisions on behalf of the economic

empowerment of marginalized, rural women with limited options to access occupational opportunities in Sri Lanka. The role of governments to ensure the welfare of all its citizens is questionable within the behaviour of the GoSL. The findings of this study reveal how succeeding governments targeted one of the most vulnerable groups in the country to achieve its policy interests by interpreting it as a measure taken to ensure their well-being. Interestingly, the government targets female migrant workers and identifies them as an irrational and vulnerable group of citizens that requires the intervention of the state while a key driver of these interventions is to reach the macro-level financial interests of the government. This is direct discrimination against prospective female migrant workers who are less educated<sup>5</sup> and lack of professional and technical skills that require to have a satisfactory job in their home country.

Although no sex-desegregated data are available, Sri Lanka is ranked in 46<sup>th</sup> place at the global brain drain index (Global Economy, 2021). A considerable amount of female skilled workers and students migrate expecting better occupational and educational opportunities which have a considerable impact on the country's economy. However, the government intentionally ignored these educated middle-class women and only targeted the vulnerable and marginalized group of women (who have not been able to benefit from the 'free education' and therefore have no access to decent job opportunities within the country) to enforce their authority.

The findings of this section reveal how the government has successfully employed socially constructed gender roles to prevent women (particularly those who are poor and have no access to a proper livelihood in home country) from selecting their preferred occupation. It further points out the negative impacts of this sudden initiative which contrasts with Foucault's argument that the rationale behind the state interventions is to ensure the betterment of its citizens. Thus, it further confirms that Sri Lanka still has a long way to go to achieve gender equality, despite holding the 73<sup>rd</sup> place in Gender Inequality Index by leading among South Asian countries.

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## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Despite that there are several international institutions, instruments, and frameworks available to protect migrant workers, interventions from individual state levels are important as issues faced by migrant workers vary depending upon their countries of destination and occupational category. Disregarding that this intervention could be made through diplomatic channels such as signing bilateral agreements which will ensure government-to-government commitment to protect migrant workers, states often control the behaviour of their citizens by using its power over the citizens.

Foucault's approach concerning the government is that it does not merely manage state affairs or political affairs but also endeavours to shape, guide, direct or lead the conduct of individual citizens. Foucault pointed out that the concept of 'power' exists only if it is exercised by some on others, similarly, the government's power exists only if it places rules and regulations on its subjects/citizens. This exercise of power is not only about constraining or coercing but about ensuring the citizens demonstrate certain behaviours and outcomes. The power of the government depends on how this action of power is demonstrated by the citizens. For this purpose, the governments structure the possibilities of some action outcomes or artificially arrange and re-arrange structures for people until they follow it as they ought to do. This management takes place from a distance, where those who are being governed are not necessarily aware that their 'conduct is conducted' by the government to achieve its objectives.

The government of Sri Lanka's introduction of the National Policy on Migration and therein categorization and justification of female migration workers as a 'vulnerable' category to place its mechanism of management (laws and regulation) to intervene/control the behaviour of this select group of citizens based on the state's interests over the period, reveals the government's embedded thinking of group manipulation by invoking specific social and cultural norms. This study also brought out that, in this process, how the government has reinforced

/reproduced gender norms in the society to convince its decisions regarding female migration to its citizens as well as justify them to the international community.

The inadequacy of research on the impact of mother's migration towards children's development (under five years of the age and above five years of age) is a lacuna in the field, particularly in Sri Lankan context. Concrete findings on this issue would be much helpful in further discussing the government policies targeting this group. The action of governments as controlling measures over citizens, studied by using alternate analytical tools such as 'governmentality' is also limited. Therefore, this research suggests more explorative research on the field combining the tools offered by political and economic analysts to fill this gap.

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## END NOTES

1. This age limits vary depending on the destination country i.e., Saudi Arabia – 25 years, other Middle East countries – 23 years, other countries – 21 years.
2. While the remittances will benefit to reduce the poverty among the families of migrant workers in micro level, it will also benefit the macro level economic growth of the country through increasing foreign exchange.
3. The total remittances received from the Middle East region has not been reduced and was between 50% to 60% since 2000 – 2020 (Foreign Employment Bureau, 2020a)
4. Head of the (tea) estates. Plantation sector is the only income earning method for females who live in rural (mountain) areas of the country. Almost all the women who live in these areas work in tea estates and are earning less than 10 USD per day.
5. This is also noteworthy as Sri Lanka offers free education to all. However, in reality, free education is only limited to urban areas and the students in rural areas are not provided with equal resources, opportunities in comparison to them.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Five years of RTI regime in Sri Lanka: factors causing low proactive disclosure of information and possible remedies

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**Abstract:** Statutory obligations are imposed upon ministers by sections 8 and 9 of the Right to Information Act (RTI Act)<sup>1</sup>, while Regulation No. 20<sup>2</sup> issues guidelines for public authorities on the proactive disclosure of information through a digital or electronic format. However, slow progress in implementing proactive disclosure measures and the resultant absence of vital information on digital platforms in a constantly updated and user-friendly manner is not only a failure of the public authority to comply with legal obligations to disclose information proactively but also causing a further delay in realising full benefits of the RTI Act by the citizen. This paper examines the present status of the proactive disclosure of information by public authorities in terms of the RTI Act and analyses factors that cause the low performance. Secondary data, particularly results of two studies in 2017 and 2020 undertaken by Verité Research and the Right to Information Commission (RTIC), respectively, have been analysed using descriptive methods. The study found that a key factor causing the low proactive online disclosure is the absence of practices of modern record management and the near absence of proper identification of ‘records’ or ‘information’ generated by public authorities by indexing and cataloguing and by maintaining regularly updated schedules of records. The second key factor found is the absence of a schedule of proactively disclosable records that is maintained constantly updated for monitoring such records. The lack of awareness and a clear knowledge of concepts on the part of state officials are also found as critical issues. The study recommends that all public authorities maintain (a) a general records schedule [common to all agencies]; and (b) an agency records schedule [unique to the agency], preferably in electronic format, and update the same on a daily basis. It is also recommended that a public authority maintains a schedule of proactively disclosable records called a “Proactive Disclosure Matrix”, preferably in electronic format and updates the same on a daily basis.

**Keywords:** Proactive disclosure; schedules of records; record management; retention schedule.

## INTRODUCTION

Information is fundamental to the functioning of modern democracy and is a key element of the overall global trend towards more open government. (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2016). The guarantee of access to the right to information and use of it across the society helps not only the meaningful operation of many other human rights but also facilitates the socio-economic progress of a country through the efficient use of resources resulting from transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance. By 2019, 125 countries have implemented laws to provide access to information for citizens of various degrees<sup>3</sup>. The Right to Information Act (RTI Act) provides the legal framework to safeguard the right of access to information guaranteed by the Constitution of Sri Lanka<sup>4</sup>. Primarily the Act enables citizens to submit information requests to public authorities and make appeals to the Designated Officer and the Right to Information Commission (RTIC) in case of rejection. In equal terms, by Sections 7,8,9 and 10 in part III, the Act also directs Ministers and public authorities to manage their records and disclose information proactively.

The Constitution<sup>5</sup> stipulates that as ‘Every citizen shall have the right of access to any information as provided by law, being information that is required for the exercise or protection of a citizen’s right.’ The RTI Act contains a number of elements which comprehensively facilitate the conception of RTI. Its overarching public interest clause provides that, notwithstanding specified grounds for denial<sup>6</sup>, a request for information shall not be refused where the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the harm that would result from its disclosure<sup>7</sup>. The specified grounds of denial are, by and large, standard ones, covering various facets of privacy, national

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security and legal privilege<sup>8</sup>. More noteworthy is that none of the grounds of denial is absolute; even besides the public interest override, a number of grounds can be overruled if the requested information is over ten years old<sup>9</sup>.

The public interest override is not a universal feature in RTI laws, and its inclusion in Sri Lankan law is noteworthy<sup>10</sup>. Importantly, the Act places the burden of disproving an overriding public interest onto public authorities instead of requiring requesters to prove it throughout the process. (Verité Research, 2017). This is also complemented by the RTI Act's supremacy over the other laws. The Act provides that in the event of any inconsistency or conflict between the RTI Act and any other law, the provisions of the RTI Act shall prevail<sup>11</sup>.

RTI Act's regulations and rules provide a comprehensive legal framework and the procedure for reactively requesting and providing information. A citizen or a public authority could contest their position to the Court of Appeal and finally to the Supreme Court. The Act also directs public authorities requiring them to disclose information proactively. Section 14 affirms the principle of proactive disclosure in the context of the RTI Commission's mandate to prescribe fees levied by public authorities to release information. The requirements for proactive disclosure are set out under sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act and Regulation No. 20 under the Act. Sections 8 and 9 are applicable to all ministries, while Regulation No. 20 is applicable to 'all public authorities', the term that includes ministries<sup>12</sup>.

Provisions on proactive disclosure of information imposed upon ministers by sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act are statutory obligations. Section 8 of the Act places a duty on every minister to bi-annually publish a report containing information relating to their respective ministry and all the public authorities falling under the purview of that ministry. This duty is also applicable to ministers of provincial councils<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, section 8 requires ministries to publish information in all three languages. Section 9 of the RTI Act requires every minister to inform the public about the initiation of projects three months prior to the project's commencement. Regulation No. 20 sets out a public authority's obligations with respect to proactive disclosure. These regulations expand the statutory obligations under section 8 and section 9.

The Regulation 20<sup>14</sup> enumerates a set of guidelines for 'public authorities' on proactive disclosure of information. In accordance with the power to direct a Public Authority to provide information in a particular form under the Act<sup>15</sup> and in keeping with the overriding principle of Proactive Disclosure, all Public Authorities shall routinely disseminate, at a minimum, the key information through a digital or electronic format<sup>16</sup>; These key information include 16 broad themes, e.g. Institutional information, Organisational information, Operational information, Public services information, Budget information etc. which should be disclosed proactively, vide Annex-I.

Regulation -20 also provides the procedure for any citizen to make a complaint to the Head or the CEO of the relevant Public Authority in the event any information disclosed proactively pursuant to the duty contained in this Regulation is improper and/or false and/or has not been updated. If the Head or the CEO fails to rectify the same, the citizen may apply to the Commission within three months of the said disclosure to rectify improper/false/outdated information for reasons stated<sup>17</sup>. If the Commission finds merit in the complaint upon inquiry, the Commission shall call upon the said Public Authority to rectify the same and report to the Commission within one month<sup>18</sup>. Details of the inquiry and follow-up action (if any) shall be included in the report of the activities of the Commission required to be prepared and thereafter to be tabled before Parliament and sent to the President in terms of Section 37 of the Act<sup>19</sup>.

With the beginning of the operation of RTI in February 2017, reactive disclosure became very much in use. Citizens, individual media personnel, NGOs and various groups of people started sending information requests to the Information Officers of various public authorities. The great majority of these requests were based on individual grievances or issues, and a small number on common issues. Appeals against Designated Officers were received at the RTIC at an increasing rate. With limited human and financial resources, the RTIC had to devote

two days a week to public hearings and documentary procedures to dispose of the appeals. Citizens have used these provisions very actively, as evidenced by 2,848 appeals made to the RTIC during 2017-2020. RTIC has concluded 69.0% of appeals, showing a very high level of performance compared to other appellate bodies<sup>20</sup>. These appeals have been received from all corners of the country, showing the level of penetration of RTI throughout the society<sup>21</sup>.

The proactive disclosure obligations on the part of the Ministers and the public authorities have been lagging. The RTIC, too, had no time to vigorously pursue the promotion of proactive disclosure as it was occupied in the hearing of appeals under reactive provisions. Ministries continue to publish on their websites institutional information, e.g. internal regulations, powers and functions; operational information, organisational structure, and the names and contact information of executive grade public officials and their remunerations and news and updated with news and events of their organisation, which an average citizen did not normally seek after. Some ministries did not maintain and update their websites, while the situation of departments, authorities, corporations and institutions was not much different from ministries. In addition to websites, there are numerous online and other tools such as printed media, electronic media, social media, TV, radio, pamphlets, posters, regular publications, record rooms, Facebook etc. which could be used to provide citizens with useful information proactively.

The progress of implementation of proactive disclosure measures has not been found satisfactory when compared to findings of the baseline research conducted by Verité Research in 2017 and research carried out after three years by RTIC in 2020. The results of the two studies are not exactly comparable as the sample size, and the types of public authorities covered vary. However, both studies based the assessment of online proactive information on the categories and subcategories identified by Regulation 20, and the scheme of the score of both studies are similar. A key finding is that 89.0% of public authorities ranked 'moderately unsatisfactory' in 2017, dropping to 46.7% in 2020. Public authorities ranked 'moderately satisfactory' accounted for 46.7% in 2020 as against 5.4 % in 2017. Further, the results of these two types of research are confined to online disclosure only, whereas many other methods exist for disclosing information proactively.

### **The problem**

Proactive disclosure of information is a key requirement under the RTI Act of Sri Lanka. It enables the public to access vital information on public services without a fee. Verité Research found in 2017 that the online proactive disclosure of content across public authorities was 'moderately unsatisfactory', as 89% of the selected public authorities scored below 40%. Research by RTIC in 2020 found that the percentage of the moderately unsatisfactory category has declined to 43%<sup>22</sup>. Content apart, there have been no notable improvements. The majority of primary websites lacked financial information and decision-making and regulatory information inhibiting the public's ability to hold the government accountable in terms of its planned policies and investments. The limited disclosure of information on public accessibility, such as Public Services and Public Participation prevents citizens from accessing timely services or attending public meetings or consultations. Many public authorities have not disclosed any information on projected budget, income and expenditure, or financial accountability, while the least amount of information is given regarding open meetings, tenders and copies of contracts, reports on completion of contracts, remunerations of executive grade officers, fees and deadlines etc.

Low levels of online proactive disclosure directly relating to RTI reflect weaknesses in RTI implementation across public authorities. Disclosures of information pertaining to section 9 of the RTI Act were low. Access to information listed in Regulation 20 is crucial in guaranteeing transparency of accountability of public authorities and ultimately in assuring the citizens' right to access information. Completeness and correctness of details published on websites are crucial factors. Public service information, publications, leaflets have been published on 50% of the websites monitored. Usability of such public service information is questionable since many public authorities have failed to upload forms and disclose fees and deadlines for applications on their websites. Lacking

such essential information on digital platforms is a failure of the public authority to comply with legal obligation to disclose information proactively.

The adverse effects of low performance of implementing the proactive disclosure provisions impact on citizens as they cannot optimise their welfare, on public authorities as they cannot properly discharge their functions according to the law and with cost effectiveness, on the Government as it cannot achieve its targeted in socio-economic development of the people and finally on the state in fostering a culture of transparency and accountability in public authorities and promoting a society in which the people of Sri Lanka would be able to more fully participate in public life through combating corruption and promoting accountability and good governance<sup>23</sup>.

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## THE OBJECTIVE AND METHODS

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the present status of public authorities' proactive disclosure of information in terms of the RTI Act, analyse factors that cause low performance in disclosing information proactively and to develop a mechanism for public authorities to address the issue. Specific Objectives are 1. To ascertain trends in using proactive disclosure provisions since inception of RTI Act and the present, 2. To Examine factors that cause the low performance of proactive disclosure mode, and 3. To develop a mechanism for public authorities to use the proactive disclosure procedure effectively to benefit the citizen. Secondary data, particularly results of three studies in 2017, 2020 and 2021 undertaken by Verité Research, RTIC and RTIC-UNDP, respectively, have been analysed using descriptive methods.

The results of the first two studies have been compared with the present study to identify the level of satisfaction related to content disclosure on the websites. Since these are two different research studies, i.e. baseline study undertaken by Verité Research in 2017 and the study by RTIC in 2020, it is required to mention the criteria applied to identify the satisfaction level. The monitoring framework of the first study covers two dimensions: (i) the information content disclosed and (ii) the usability of the information. Each dimension is rated based on several criteria and combined in an overall score. Eleven categories of information have been used to assess the online proactive disclosure under 30 subcategories. Public authorities were ranked according to their scores across the subcategories and categories. The assessment was language neutral, as content availability was assessed regardless of the language in which the information was disclosed. The ranking was assessed under five grades, Unsatisfactory, Moderately Unsatisfactory, Moderately Satisfactory, Satisfactory and Highly Satisfactory (Verité Research, 2017).

RTIC research, while similar substantively, did not limit to ascertaining the content; hence, the methodology was developed to score the public authorities contingent on the extent or degree of the disclosure of updated information. It values public authorities on a scale of 1 – 5 for information disclosed under each subcategory. In terms of online proactive disclosure of information, public authorities were assessed under five grade criteria similar to the Verité research.

The second and third objectives of this study were to examine factors that cause the low performance of the proactive disclosure mode and to develop a mechanism for public authorities to use the proactive disclosure procedure effectively to benefit the citizen. Results of the third study by RTIC-UNDP conducted mid-2021, involving 15 state institutes consisting of five types of organisations, viz ministry, department, authority, board and district secretariate, with the participation of 2,280 government officers working in head offices and regional and district level offices, used to identify factors that cause low performance of proactive disclosure (RTIC, 2021). Qualitative data was collected from 14 key informants involved in bringing in RTI law and since enforcement in its implementation within RTIC and other related stakeholder agencies. Fifteen focus group discussions were conducted with the three ministries, three departments, three authorities, three boards /corporations and 3 district

secretaries during an online training program in early 2020, including proactive disclosure. These qualitative data were analysed to identify the low-performing factors and to develop a mechanism for the use of public authorities.

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## ANLYSIS AND RESULTS

In 2017, the year in which the RTIC commenced its operation, The World Bank and Verité Research, developed and tested a methodology to objectively measure the online proactive disclosure requirements of the RTI Act. This report ranked 55 public authorities, i.e. 53 cabinet portfolios and the President and Prime Minister's Offices, on fulfilling their online proactive disclosure obligations, based on a pilot assessment conducted between 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017. This report was the first of its kind and can be considered as a baseline though limited to one type of public authority, *central government ministry*, and one mode of proactive disclosure, *online*. The study analysed online proactive disclosure of information pertaining to eleven categories of information, which were further divided into 30 subcategories. A scoring scheme has been devised with three types of information viz 1: up-to-date information, 2: complete information 3: up-to-date and complete information. Public authorities received scores for content disclosure, usability and an overall composite score.

The results could be taken as the baseline for online proactive disclosure of information as public authorities had no time to introduce the same under RTI Law which came to force in 2017. The study was confined to 55 central government ministries only, whereas estimated 3000 public authorities function in the country in terms of the RTI Act. On the other hand, central government ministries, compared to all other public authorities, had well-functioning and consistently updated websites.

The study found that in terms of content disclosure, 49 out of the 55 public authorities (or 89%) scored only between 11% and 40% placing them in the 'moderately unsatisfactory' band. Only 03 public authorities (or 5.5%) scored over 40%, falling in the 'moderately satisfactory' band. Three (03) public authorities scored less than 10%, falling in the 'unsatisfactory band'.

An assessment of adherence to obligations under sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act, compared with Regulation No. 20, suggests that public authorities were relatively more likely to disclose types of information emerging from a statutory requirement. However, public authorities disclosed significantly more information in subcategories emerging from section 8 of the RTI Act than section 9 of the Act. Aside from information pertaining to detailed project costs, hardly any information has been disclosed under other subcategories emerging from section 9 of the Act, such as notification of project commencement and terms and conditions of investment. Public authorities scored relatively higher in terms of usability in comparison with content. Usability measures: (a) language accessibility, (b) ease of access, and (c) format. Overall, 20% of public authorities scored in the 'moderately satisfactory' band. The majority (75%) of public authorities scored within the 'moderately unsatisfactory' band. 5% of public authorities received 'unsatisfactory' scores, which strongly limits effective access and the potential use and reuse of public sector information. The language in which most information was disclosed was English, followed by Sinhala and Tamil. Yet gaps in trilingual accessibility of information remain, as the highest language accessibility score was 50%.

In a study undertaken by RTIC with the support of UNDP in June 2020, around three years later, online proactive disclosed information from 30 websites of five types of public authorities has been analysed. Thirty public authorities have been randomly selected as the sample consisting of a proportionate number of ministries, departments, authorities, corporations, district secretariats and divisional secretariats. The official websites have been monitored under 15 main categories and 37 subcategories as set out in Regulation 20. The research was not limited to ascertaining the content; hence, the methodology was developed to score the public authorities contingent on the extent or degree of the disclosure of updated information. It values public authorities by a scale of 1 – 5 for information disclosed under each subcategory.



In terms of online proactive disclosure of information, 14 out of 30 public authorities (or 46.7%) were at a ‘moderately satisfactory’ level. While another 14 public authorities (or 46.7%) were rated in the ‘moderately unsatisfactory’ level, only two public authorities (or 6.6%) reached the ‘satisfactory level’. None of the public authorities of the sample has received over 150 out of 185 marks to reach the ‘satisfactory’ level. Most public authorities (76%) have disclosed their institutional information, such as the legal basis of the institution, internal regulations, powers and functions, to reach the levels between ‘moderately satisfactory’ to ‘satisfactory’ vide Table-1.

**Table 1:** Online content disclosure of Public Authorities

Public authority	Total score out of 185	Score as a percentage	Performance level	
MINISTRIES	Ministry of Urban Development, Water Supply and Housing Facilities	95	51	Moderately satisfactory
	Ministry of Environment and Wildlife Resources	105	56	Moderately satisfactory
	Ministry of Public Administration Home Affairs	93	50	Moderately satisfactory
	Provincial Councils & Local Government			
	Ministry of Defense	86	46	Moderately satisfactory
	Ministry of Education	98	52	Moderately satisfactory
	Ministry of Ports and Shipping	68	36	Moderately unsatisfactory
DEPARTMENT	Department of Inland Revenue	115	62	Satisfactory
	Department of Labour	96	51	Moderately satisfactory
	Department of Motor Traffic	86	46	Moderately satisfactory
	Department of Prisons	86	46	Moderately satisfactory
	Department of Pensions	88	47	Moderately satisfactory
	Department of Police	107	57	Moderately satisfactory
BODY CORPORATIONS AUTHORITIES	Central Environmental Authority	105	56	Moderately satisfactory
	National Medicines Regulatory Authority	116	62	Satisfactory
	Vocational Training Authority	75	40	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Tourism Development Authority	95	51	Moderately Satisfactory
	Road Development Authority	75	40	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Urban Development Authority	51	27	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Ceylon Electricity Board	69	37	Moderately unsatisfactory
	National Water Supply and Drainage Board	107	57	Moderately Satisfactory
	National Lotteries Board	61	32	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Agriculture and Agrarian Insurance Board	69	37	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Export Development Board	68	36	Moderately unsatisfactory
Sri Lanka Transport Board	95	51	Moderately satisfactory	
DISTRICT/DIVISIONAL SECRETARIATS	Gampaha District Secretariat	60	32	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Nuwara Eliya District Secretariat	54	29	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Trincomalee District Secretariat	68	36	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Matale District Secretariat	68	36	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Maharagama Divisional Secretariat	37	20	Moderately unsatisfactory
	Bentota Divisional Secretariat	68	36	Moderately unsatisfactory

Source: RTIC Research 2020

Only 27% of the public authorities have disclosed updated operational information such as strategies and plans, policies, activities and procedures, reports and evaluations to a ‘satisfactory level’. Public authorities most commonly disclose on the subcategory of ‘activities and procedures’. In terms of budgetary information, 70% of the public authorities from the sample do not maintain updated details of their projected budgets and actual income and expenditure on their websites. Overall, 50% of the institution have uploaded details on services offered to the public and related leaflets, forms and publications. Nonetheless, information on fees for the services and deadlines are not available on the websites of 93% of the public authorities. Websites of 63% of the public authorities monitored have details on the right of access to information, processing of requests and contact details of the information officers.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the two studies are not exactly comparable as the sample size, and the types of public authorities covered vary. However, both studies based the assessment of online proactive information on the categories and subcategories identified by Regulation 20, and the scheme of allocating scores of both studies were similar. A key finding is that % of public authorities ranked ‘moderately unsatisfactory’ (or 89%) in 2017 declined to 46.7% in 2020. Public authorities ranked ‘moderately satisfactory’ level for 46.7% in 2020 against 5.4 % in 2017.

Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act apply to all ministries. Section 8 refers specifically to a ‘Minister’s duty to publish a report’, which includes: ‘the particulars relating to the organisation, functions, activities and duties of the Ministry of such Minister and of all the public authorities falling within the functions so assigned.’ Furthermore, section 8 requires ministries to publish information in all three languages. Section 9 requires every minister to inform the public about the initiation of projects three months prior to project commencement. Regulatory obligations on proactive disclosure emanate from Regulation No. 20, published under the RTI Act. These regulations elaborate the statutory obligations under section 8 and section 9.

### (i) Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from Section 8

Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from Sec 8 of the RTI Act include information on 1. the Mandate, 2. Functions and powers, 3. Decision-making procedures, 4. Description of services offered to the public, 5. Accessing public services, 6. The projected budget for the current year, 7. Disbursements in the previous year, 8. Information Officer’s and Designated Officer’s contact information, 9. Fee schedule, and 10. Minister’s report as per section 8 of the RTI Act. Verité Research (2017) ranks public authorities in terms of online proactive disclosure under these subcategories of information, taking into account both content and language accessibility, only one Ministry received a ‘satisfactory’ score, while 14 public authorities (26%) received a ‘moderately satisfactory’ score, and 38 public authorities (72%) received a ‘moderately unsatisfactory’ score. RTIC (2020), on the other hand, reports that the moderately unsatisfactory score declined to 43%. Most public authorities (76%) have disclosed their institutional information, such as the legal basis of the institution, internal regulations, powers and functions, to reach the levels between ‘moderately satisfactory’ to ‘satisfactory’. This shows that 42% of public authorities did not have adequate disclosure, particularly in respect of categories: (4). Description of services offered to the public, (5). Accessing public services, and (9). Fee schedule changes constantly require updates as they change over time and are interactively accessible to citizens in a user-friendly manner.

### (ii) Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from Section 9

Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from Sec 9 of the RTI Act include information on 1. Notification of project commencement, 2. Pre-feasibility and feasibility studies of projects, 3. Terms and conditions of investment, 4. Detailed project costs, and 5. Monitoring and evaluation reports. Verité Research (2017) ranks public authorities in terms of online proactive disclosure under these subcategories of information without taking ‘official languages’ which are not specified, but taking only content disclosure, 100% public authorities within the ‘moderately unsatisfactory’ band, i.e. all scoring below 40%. The available close comparative figure for 2020 is 43 % public authorities scoring below 40% (moderately unsatisfactory). RTIC 2020 reports that only 27% of the public authorities have disclosed updated operational information such as strategies and plans, policies, activities and procedures, reports and evaluations to a ‘satisfactory level’. Public authorities most commonly disclose details on the subcategory of ‘activities and procedures’. Within this band, too, 22.6 % of Public authorities (12) scored between 16-32 %, while the great majority 77.4 % (41) scored just 11% showing the very low level of disclosure.

## (iii) Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from both Section 8 and Section 9

When a combined ranking (both Sec 8 and Sec 9) is calculated by Verité Research (2017) on the fulfilment of statutory obligations, 45 public authorities (85%) scored in the 'moderately unsatisfactory' band, while only 8 public authorities (15%) scored in the 'moderately satisfactory' band.

## (iv) Statutory obligations on proactive disclosure emerging from Regulation 20

Proactive disclosures emerging under Regulation No. 20 include information under 16 key themes vide Annex-I. Verité Research (2017), as there is no specific requirement to disclose information in the 'official languages', only ranked according to content disclosure. Only three public authorities (5%) received a 'moderately satisfactory' score, while 42 public authorities (76%) had a 'moderately unsatisfactory' score. Seven public authorities received an 'unsatisfactory' score, while three public authorities (5%) had no content available. RTIC (2020) reports moderately unsatisfactory scores, having declined to 43%, while Moderately satisfactory scores increased to 43%.

## (v) Overall statutory obligations on proactive disclosure

When the overall level of compliance with respect to obligations under (a) sections 8 and 9; and (b) Regulation No. 20 was considered, Verité Research (2017) found that there was relatively more information published in compliance with sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act compared to information disclosures under Regulation No. 20 alone. However, higher information disclosure emerging from statutory obligations was seen as largely driven by compliance with section 8. RTIC (2020) report has only covered Regulation 20. However, it consists of categories of Sections 8 and 9 as well. As per Verité Research (2017), overall, in terms of content and usability, 49 public authorities (89%) received a 'moderately unsatisfactory' rating, scoring 11%-40%, while three public authorities (5%) received an 'unsatisfactory' rating scoring below 11%. Only three public authorities scored above 40%. RTIC (2020) found a decline in the 'moderately unsatisfactory' category to 43%, while the 'moderately satisfactory' category improved to 43%. Overall, the very low proactive disclosure level is shown as the 'moderately satisfactory' category is still just above 40%.

## (vi) Most up to date vis a vis Least amount released

Verité Research (2017) shows that public authorities provided the most up-to-date and complete information in respect of Budgets, Expenditures and Finances (category score of 67%), Institutional Information (49%) and Public Policy, Legislation and Regulation (35%). The least amount of information was disclosed in Prior Disclosures of Information (0%), Prior Disclosures of Public Investments (13%), and Categorisations of, and Systems for, Accessing Information (14%). Notably, these three categories are directly related to the right to information. There is an 'unsatisfactory' level of RTI-relevant online proactive disclosure of information across public authorities. RTIC (2020), in terms of budgetary information, 70% of the public authorities from the sample do not maintain updated details of their projected budgets and actual income and expenditure on their websites. Overall, 50% of the institutions have uploaded details on services offered to the public and related leaflets, forms and publications. Nonetheless, information on fees for the services and deadlines are not available on the websites of 93% of the public authorities. Websites of 63% of the public authorities monitored have details on the right of access to information, request process and contact details of the information officers.

## (vii) Ranking Content Disclosures

Verité Research (2017) maintains that when content disclosure was monitored by awarding the highest possible score for stipulated categories of up-to-date and complete information, regardless of the language. No public authority received a score higher than 43% for content disclosure. Twenty public authorities (36%) scored between 25% and 43%, while 31 public authorities (56%) scored between 10% and 24% for content disclosure. Four public

authorities (7%) scored between 0% and 9%. RTIC (2020) maintains that 50% of the institutions have uploaded details on services offered to the public and related leaflets, forms and publications. Nonetheless, information on fees for the services and deadlines are not available on the websites of 93% of the public authorities. Websites of 63% of the public authorities monitored have details on the right of access to information, request process and contact details of the information officers.

(viii) Factors related to low performance of Proactive Disclosure

The issue that causes low performance is poor standards of record management. A system of proper cataloguing and indexing of paper and digital records generated and received by the respective public authority with regular updating and ready access to its key staff members in most of the public authorities is yet to be materialised. Records are managed by various units, branches, divisions of head office or regional, district or divisional offices by giving file names and numbers. However, a total inventory or index of records, which is updated regularly indicating at least the created date, location, the officer having the physical custody, type of information, duration of the retention period, mode of disposal etc. is not maintained by a majority of public authorities.

As a result, it is difficult for the public authority to determine which record can be proactively disclosed and take action to disclose accordingly. When an information request is received by the Information Officer<sup>24</sup> and an appeal is received by the Designated Officer<sup>25</sup>, there is no such inventory for them to glance through and ascertain the location, officer holding the information, types of information etc. Such an inventory, preferably updated digitally, is required to implement the RTI provisions within the procedure in the RTI Act.

The absence of an interactive, preferably electronic system, to quickly identify a certain item of information; that has been created or come to the possession of the public authority; as a record or document, to ascertain where it is located / stored, in whose custody, in what form, whether proactively disposable or restricted, and to retrieve it for the purpose of disclosure of information to citizens either reactively or proactively remains a critical issue. A connected issue is the difficulty of updating, preferably automatically, information on records, documents etc for the purpose of timely disposing / destroying to ensure that public authority maintain only records that are pending in action and within the time period legally required to retain before destroying.

The absence of clear demarcation of records of the respective public authority between (a) proactively disposable records and (b) records only reactively releasable on request to enable immediate action to disclose such identified information proactively and to keep other restricted information in an easily retrievable manner and in safe custody is another issue. In the absence of such a demarcation quick and timely updating of websites becomes difficult.

The lack of awareness on the part of state officials with regard to terms of 'record management' and 'proactive disclosure' as required in terms of the RTI Act is another serious issue. A survey<sup>26</sup> carried out involving 15 state institutes consisting of five types of organisations, viz ministry, department, authority, board and district secretariate, with the participation of 2,280 persons working in head offices and regional and district level offices, in mid-2021, has found that though their awareness of the RTI Act was very high on average at 72% in all types of organisations, their awareness on proactive disclosure concept was unsatisfactory, vide Table 2.

**Table 2:** Awareness on the proactive disclosure of information by type of institute

	Ministry	Department	Authority	Board	Dist-Secy	Average
Yes	31.9	42.1	42.6	25.2	57.7	40
No	68.1	57.9	57.4	74.8	42.2	60

Source: RTIC (2021)

It has been found in the same survey that they did not have a clear knowledge of the requirement to retain public documents, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Awareness on the requirement to retain public documents

Awareness	Ministry	Depart	Authority	Board	Dist secy
1) All documents should be kept forever	1.4	1.7	3.4	3.8	2.1
2) 10 years from the date of creation	16.5	3.4	29.0	25.4	18.1
3) 12 years from the date of creation	25.9	16.7	27.7	40.2	37.1
4) As per the approved disposal schedule	55.1	76.5	37.8	29.9	42.8
5) 02 years after the file is closed	1.1	1.7	2.2	0.8	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: RTIC (2021)

Further, almost 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the problems relating to record management arose from (i) informal storage practices, (ii) time consumed in searching documents and (iii) failure in maintaining the record room properly, vide Table 4.

**Table 4:** Main problems faced by organisations in relation to records management

Main problem faced by organisations	Ministry	Department	Authority	Board	Dist secy
1) Informal storage practices	30.0	30.2	33.9	27.2	29.0
2) Searching for records is time-consuming	19.1	22.2	29.7	24.8	19.7
3) Failure to properly maintain the record room	25.4	34.9	27.9	25.9	23.6
4) None of the above is applicable	25.4	12.7	8.6	22.1	27.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: RTIC (2021)

Their lack of understanding of the definition of the term record is another critical issue. In Table 5, only item 5 is considered a record. What is in item 6 is not a record but data before the authority decides to recognise it as a record by inserting it into a file. All other items are not falling under the definition of the term record. Therefore, a wide gap of around 80% in the definition of a record is to be bridged.

**Table 5:** Awareness of definition of the term 'record'

Awareness of definition of the term 'record'	Ministry	Department	Authority	Board	Dist secy
1) Books from the library of your institution	6.5	22.2	9.45	8.6	9.95
2) Magazines kept in the reception area	2.6	11.1	0.85	2.1	10.4
3) Personal emails	1.0	0.0	2.7	1.2	0.0
4) Advertising material	15.6	11.1	0.9	8.3	3.1
5) The 2022 budget estimate file	29.1	18.9	15.9	32.8	42.8
6) Temporary drafts created for your use/not filed	45.2	36.7	70.3	46.9	33.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: RTIC (2021)

## (ix) Towards developing a mechanism for public authorities

Based on the above analysis, it has been found that there is a need to strengthen the public authorities to enable them to address the key issues that cause low performance. A mechanism to expedite the process is needed, and as a necessary foundation, systematic data management at each public authority is found as the first step. Based on the legal provision in the RTI Act, a matrix has been developed to address the issues focused above and presented in Annex-III. Public authorities are expected to use the proactive disclosure procedure effectively to benefit the citizen. Addressing the above issues is vital to implement provisions relating to record management and the proactive disclosure policy enshrined in the RTI Act.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

The key factor causing the low proactive online disclosure is found as the absence of proper identification of 'record' or 'information'. Section 24 of National Archives Law (NAL) defines records, and Section 43 of the RTI Act defines 35 types of information that a citizen may legally request reactively or public authority may disclose proactively. NAL requires public offices to prepare Retention Schedules, Common and Agency-specific, and RTI Act requires to catalogue and index all information for the purpose of disclosing information to citizens. Public authorities are required to prepare vital information of records or information such as type, who created, where created, stored where and how, under whose custody, purpose and period of retention. Most of the public authorities do not follow these provisions; instead, they open files in various branches, and there is no systematic disposal of action over files. As a result, public authorities are unable to determine whether particular information could be disclosed proactively or released on request, subject to limitations.

Public authorities do not identify their records systematically, for which a records inventory is required. A high-level survey is needed to ascertain the types of information created/ received by the public authority and stored. For this purpose, records definitions in the RTI Act<sup>27</sup> and NAL<sup>28</sup> can be used as appropriate to the respective public authority. It is also observed that public authorities only proactively disclose by uploading to website documents such as Acts, Regulations, Rules, Guidelines, Institutional and operational publications, pamphlets, publicity material etc. which are clearly identifiable. The utility of these documents is low as these are available in many other methods, internet etc. For an average citizen or a client of the public authority, what is required is information on products, services, and fees charged for the day-to-day services needed for daily life, and this information changes over time. When a new government comes to power, new ministers take over the office, and new programs implement vital information required for citizen changes. Some variables change due to exchange rate, demand and supply, weather conditions, currency rates, interest rates, and daily fees. There is hardly any disclosure of such dynamic information sought by citizens. This problem can also be added if proper information schedules are maintained.

There are numerous information items which could be proactively disclosed under Section 8, 9 and Regulation 20<sup>29</sup>. There is no single document to ascertain the number of such items of information, their sub-categories and several other key details relating to individual records / information such as [1], Records/Information required under Proactive Disclosure [2] After identification as an item of information appropriate for proactive disclosure. Such information could be entered into a Proactive Disclosure schedule. This could be an electronic spreadsheet. This schedule will show ways to disclose information proactively (vide Annex-III).

Proactive disclosure of information is a key requirement under the RTI Act of Sri Lanka. It enables the public to access vital information on public services, government spending and decision-making without the payment of a fee. The online proactive disclosure of content across public authorities was 'moderately unsatisfactory', meaning the score below 40% of the 40-50% selected public authorities. Regarding public accountability, most primary websites lacked financial information; and decision-making and regulatory information. This lack of information on public authorities' websites is likely to inhibit the public's ability to hold the government

accountable in terms of its planned policies and investments. However, certain categories of substantive information, such as Budgets, Expenditure and Finances, and Public Policy, Legislation and Regulation, were most often found on other websites.

Furthermore, the limited disclosure of information on public accessibility, such as public services and public participation, can prevent citizens from accessing timely services or attending public meetings or consultations. Low levels of online proactive disclosure directly relating to RTI reflect weaknesses in RTI implementation across public authorities. Public authorities disclosed relatively more information on statutory obligations than regulatory obligations. However, disclosures of information pertaining to Section 9 of the RTI Act were low. Public authorities fared relatively better in terms of the usability of information – including language accessibility, ease of access, and format – with 20% of public authorities ranking within the ‘moderately satisfactory’ band. English emerged as the language with the highest level of information disclosure, followed by Sinhala and Tamil. However, no public authority scored more than 50% for accessibility across the three languages. These gaps in online proactive disclosure impede public access to trilingual information.

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A key policy implication arising out of the conclusions of the study is the need to manage records in the public authorities. Section 7 (1) of the RTI Act directs public authorities to maintain all its records duly catalogued and indexed “...as is consistent with its operational requirements ...” to facilitate the right of access to information. 7(3) All records being maintained shall be preserved (a) records already in existence, for a period of not less than ten years and (b) new records created after the Act, for a period of not less than twelve years of the RTI Act and (5) every public authority shall endeavour to preserve all its records in electronic format within a reasonable time, subject to the availability of resources.

It is recommended that all public authorities maintain (a) a general records schedule [common to all agencies] and (b) an agency schedule [unique to the agency] in the given format in Annex-II, preferably in electronic format, and to update the same on a daily basis. These are not new introductions, as the Department of National Achieves has issued circulars to prepare and maintain Retention Schedules of Records. This will help to identify records or information generated / received by the public authority and to disclose proactively in a selected method so that the citizen will receive updated useful information in a user-friendly manner in an efficient way. The second key policy recommendation is that the public authority maintains a Proactive Disclosure Matrix, as shown in Annex-III, preferably in electronic format and updates the same on a daily basis. This will help to identify records or information generated / received by the public authority which should be disclosed proactively; the method used, languages, whether electronic or hard copies, location, format etc. will help to ensure that the citizen will receive updated, useful information in a user-friendly manner in an efficient way. The above two steps would complete the institutional arrangements within the public authority to facilitate proactive disclosure and provide information by Information Officer on request.

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## END NOTES

1. Act No 12 of 2016
2. Extraordinary Gazette No. 2004/66 on 3-2.2017
3. UNESCO -18 July 2019-<https://sdg.iisd.org/news/UNESCO>
4. Article 14A
5. Article 14A of the Constitution
6. Section 5 of RTI Act
7. Section 5(4) of RTI Act

8. Section 5 of RTI Act
9. Ibid., ss 5(c), (i), (k)-(n).
10. Global Right to Information Rating, 'Indicator 31,' <http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/by-indicator/?indicator=31>.
11. Right to Information Act No. 12 of 2016, s 4
12. Sec 43 RTI Act
13. Sec 8
14. Extraordinary Gazette No. 2004/66 on 3-2.2017
15. Section 15(d)
16. ibid
17. Sub Section 4 of Regulation 20
18. Subsection 5 of Regulation 20
19. Subsection 6 of Regulation 20
20. RTIC Annual Reports-230, 800, 1089, 729 appeals made to the RTIC during 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively
21. Ibid-
22. These results are not exactly comparative, only indicative as sample size, sample composition , type of public authorities of the two researches are vary.
23. The Preamble RTI Act
24. S. 23 (1) (a) of RTI Act, An official appointed to entertain information requests of citizens
25. S. 23(1) (a) of RTI Act, An official appointed to hear appeals made by citizens regarding their information requests
26. Final Report: RTIC-UNDP Consultancy Project: Technical Advice to Implement Proactive Disclosure Policy and Record Management Guidelines- Key Outcomes and Next Steps, May-September 2021- RTIC, Sri Lanka (RTIC,2021)
27. Sec 43 of RTI Act: "information" includes any material which is recorded in, in any form including records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, log books, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, correspondence, memorandum, draft legislation, book, plan, map, drawing, diagram, pictorial or graphic work, photograph, film, microfilm, sound recording, video tape, machine readable record, computer records and other documentary material, regardless of its physical form or character and any copy thereof; There are provisions in the NAL to prepare a Retention Schedule or General Record Schedule- common to all state agencies eg. Audit, fiscal, correspondence, administration, while Agency specific Schedule- unique to the agency can be prepared to inventorise agency specific records/ information eg. For hospital, bed tickets etc
28. Sec 24 As any original or copy of any manuscript, paper, letter, register, report, book, magazine, map, chart, plan, drawing, picture, photograph or any other record or part thereof either handwritten, drawn, printed or produced in any other way on paper or on any other material except granite and officially received or produced or prepared in any public office in the course of its official functions and includes any cinematograph, film, recording, tape, disc or production in any other media received in any public office."
29. Regulation No. 20 published in the Gazette Extra Ordinary No. 2004/66 of February 3, 2017.



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### Annex 1:

Regulation No. 20

Proactive Disclosure of Information

01. In accordance with the power to direct a Public Authority to provide information in a particular form under Section 15(d) of the Act and in keeping with the overriding principle of Proactive Disclosure, all Public Authorities shall routinely disseminate, at a minimum, the following key information including through a digital or electronic format;
- i. Institutional information: legal basis of the institution, internal regulations, functions and powers.
  - ii. Organisational information: Organisational structure including information on personnel, and the names and contact information of executive grade public official their remunerations, emoluments and allowances.
  - iii. Operational information: strategy and plans, policies, activities, procedures, reports and evaluations, including the facts and other documents and data being used as a basis for formulating them.
  - iv. Decisions and acts: Decisions and formal acts, particularly those that directly affect the public including the data and documents used as the basis for these decisions and acts.
  - v. Public services information: Descriptions of services offered to the public, guidance, booklets and leaflets, copies of forms, information on fees and deadlines.
  - vi. Budget information: Projected budget, actual income and expenditure (including salary scales pertaining to the emoluments and related allowances of officers and employees of executive rank and above,) and other financial information and audit reports.
  - vii. Open meetings information: Information on meetings, including which are open to the public and how to attend these meetings.
  - viii. Decision making & public participation: Information on decision making procedures including mechanisms for consultations and public participation in decision making.
  - ix. Information on subsidies: Information on the beneficiaries of subsidies, the objective, amounts, and implementation.

- x. Public procurement information: Detailed information on public procurement processes, criteria and outcomes of decision making on tender applications; copies of contracts, and reports on completion of contracts.
  - xi. Lists, registers, databases: Information on the lists, registers, and databases held by the public body. Information about whether these lists, registers, and databases are available online and/ or for onsite access by members of the public.
  - xii. Information about information held: An index or register of documents/ information held including details of information held in databases.
  - xiii. Information on publications: Information on publications issued, including whether publications are fee of charge or the price if they must be purchased.
  - xiv. Information about the right to information: Information on the right of access to information and how to request information, including contact information for the responsible person in each public body.
  - xv. Disclosed information: Information which has been disclosed pursuant to a request and which is likely to be of interest to others.
  - xvi. The above information shall include all relevant facts taken into consideration while formulating important policies or announcing decisions which affect the public.
02. In addition to the categories listed in clause 01, Public Authorities shall endeavour to include in their Section 8 reports such information as may be of interest to the public, among other things so as to limit the need for members of the public to resort to the use of this Act to obtain that information.
03. All Public Authorities shall periodically update the information referred to above.
04. Any citizen may, if he/she finds, upon inspection of the information provided by Public Authorities in terms of Sections 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Act and pursuant to the duty of Proactive Disclosure contained in this Regulation, that the information is improper and/or false and/or has not been updated, complain to the Head or the CEO of the relevant Public Authority. If the Head or the CEO of the Public Authority fails to rectify the same, the citizen may make an application to the Commission within three months of the said disclosure for rectification of the said improper/ false/outdated information for reasons stated.
05. If upon inquiry into the reasons stated, the Commission finds merit in the complaint, the Commission shall call upon the said Public Authority to rectify the same and report to the Commission within one month of the said order of the Commission.
06. Details of the inquiry and follow-up action (if any) shall be included in the report of the activities of the Commission required to be prepared and thereafter to be tabled before Parliament and sent to the President in terms of Section 37 of the Act.

**Annex 2:** (a) General records schedule [common to all agencies]; (b) Agency schedule [unique to the agency]

(A) GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULE [COMMON TO ALL AGENCIES]; (B) AGENCY SCHEDULE [UNIQUE TO THE AGENCY]																		
NO	WHAT RECORDS DO YOU HAVE? 35 types - Sec 43 eg records	WHO CREATED THEM		WHEN RECORDED CREATED	WHERE ARE THEY STORED		How records are managed?				What is the purpose of record?				Custody		Kept for how long?	
		Generated by Agency	Received by Agency	date created	IF HARD MATERIAL	IF SOFT MATERIAL	Client files	Project Documents	Invoices	General Correspondence	Statute	Regulations	Management reporting	Program Administration	Who is responsible	Location	Disclosure proactively	10 Years prior to RTI
R/1				2010												Y/N		
R/2				2016														
R/3				2017													2027	
				2018													2027	
				2019														2029
																		2030
																		2031

**Annex 3: RTI Act- PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE MATRIX**

RTI- PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE MATRIX							
NAME OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY							
Category under Regulation 20 [1]	Records/Information required under Proactive Disclosure [2]	Methods [INDEX 1-11] [3]	Official languages [INDEX 1-5] [4]	Available Electronic Form [Y/N] [5]	Available for public inspection [Y/N] [6]	Copies issued to a citizen [Y/N] [7]	Differently-able persons [INDEX 1-....] [8]
1.Institutional information:	1.1 Legal basis of the institution 1.2 Internal Rules & Regulations 1.3 Internal instructions & manuals 1.4 Functions and powers 1.5 Mandate (vision & mission)						
2. Organisational information:	2.1 Organisational structure 2.2 Functions, activities and duties of public authority 2.3 -DO- names and contacts of executive grade officials 2.4 Norms for functions, performance and exercise of powers 2.5 Remunerations, emoluments and allowances of 2.2						
3.Operational information:	3.1 strategy and plans 3.2 policies 3.3 activities and duties 3.4 procedures 3.5 reports, evaluations and data						
4.Decisions and acts:	4.1 Decision making procedure 4.2 Decisions and formal acts, directly affecting public 4.3 Data and documents used as basis for 4.1						
5.Public services information:	5.1 Descriptions of services offered to the public 5.2 Accessing public services 5.3 Guidance, booklets and leaflets re 5.4 Forms, information on fees and deadlines re 5.1						
6.Budget information:	6.1 Projected budget (current year) 6.2 Actual income and expenditure (Last year) 6.3. Salary scales of emoluments and allowances of executive rank and above 6.4 Financial information and audit reports						
7. Open meetings information:	7.1 Information on meetings 7.2 Meetings open to the public 7.3 How to attend open meetings						
8. Decision making & public participation:	8.1 Information on decision making procedures 8.2 Mechanisms for public consultations						

	8.3 Public participation in decision making
9. Information on subsidies:	9.1 Information on the beneficiaries of subsidies 9.2 Objective, amounts, and implementation
10. Public procurement information:	10.1 Details of public procurement processes 10.2 -Do- criteria 10.3 Outcomes of decisions on tender applications 10.4 Copies of contracts 10.5 Reports on completion of contracts
11. Lists, registers, databases:	11.1 Information on the lists and registers 11.2 -Do- databases held by the PA 11.3 Lists and registers available online onsite access 11.4 Databases available online onsite access by public
12. Information about information held:	12.1 An index or register of documents/ information held 12.2 Details of 12.1 are held in databases.
13. Information on publications:	13.1 Information on publications issued 13.2 Publications free of charge or the price
14. Information about the right to information:	14.1 Information on access to RTI 14.2 Facilities to citizens for obtaining information 14.3 Information Officer's Designation Officer's contact 14.4 How to request information 14.5 Fee Schedule
15. Disclosed information:	15.1 Information disclosed pursuant to a request
16. The above information shall include:	16.1 All facts considered when formulating important policies affecting public
(1) Minister's report as per section 8 of the RTI Act	(1) Minister's report as per section 8 of the RTI Act
(2). Information Disclosure emerge from section 9 of the RTI Act:	1. Notification of project commencement 2. Pre-feasibility and feasibility studies of projects 3. Terms and conditions of investment 4. Monitoring and evaluation reports 5. Detailed project costs
(1) INDEX FOR METHODS Column-(3) 1. Website 2. Printed media 3. Electronic media 4. Social media 5. TV 6. Radio 7. Phamplets 8. Posters 9 Regular Publications 10. GS, AGA, Las (11) Record Room	
(2)INDEX FOR LANGUAGES Column(4): 1. Sinhala, 2. Tamil 3. English, 4. Bi-lingual, 5 Tri-lingual	
(3)INDEX for DIFFERENTLY ABLED: Column (8)	

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Impact of financial market development on economic growth: evidence from Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** The study focuses on the impact of financial market development (FMD) on economic growth in Sri Lanka. The study investigates positive association flows from finance to growth, called the “supply-leading hypothesis”, in different directions such as positive, negative, bidirectional and neutral. FMD impact is considered in both depth and efficiency aspects. Natural logarithms (Ln) form of all gross domestic production in real terms, total domestic credit, percentage of loans and advances to total deposits, inflation index, market capitalisation of listed domestic companies and money supply as liquidity indicator are concerned, first being the dependent variable, next two as depth indicators and last three explanatories as efficiency indicating variables. Changes in both private sector production volume Index and government expenditure are also included into the model as independent variables to represent the non-financial market impact. Secondary monthly time series data published by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka from January 2008 to June 2019 of 138 observations are analysed using the E-views version 10. The ARDL model is applied. The study suggests a significant long-run impact of FMD on economic growth in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, inflation hinders the FMD. Up to the bearable limit, financial depth positively affects, while the higher degree of financial depth negatively influences economic growth in Sri Lanka. The impact of the non-financial market is comparatively insignificant on economic growth.

**Keywords:** Financial market development, economic growth, financial market depth, financial market efficiency.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of financial market development on economic progress has been investigated and received attention by every country in the world and by international financial policy-making institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Both these institutions encouraged the countries to expand the financial sector by emphasising its importance to economic well-being. The primary reason is that financial markets are the key player in the intermediation of the financial system, which efficiently directs the flow of surplus savings towards investment in an economy. This facilitates the accumulation of capital and thereby leads to an increase or value addition in the production of goods and services in an economy. Continuous increases in real production itself can be defined as economic growth.

It is apparent that the empirical relationship between financial development and economic growth is not yet well established. According to the literature review, the study provides evidence for five types of relationships between financial market development (FMD) and economic growth. These are categorised into supply-leading hypothesis, demand-leading hypothesis, bi-directional, antigrowth or negatively correlated and with no causal relationship between FMD and economic growth. The study focused only on the “supply-leading hypothesis” which is dominant in contrast to the empirical literature. This hypothesis suggests one of the unidirectional relationships which flows from financial market development to economic growth. Most economists and empirical studies reveal that financial market development is an important economic growth pillar.

Initially, the conceptual framework is adapted from the “endogenous growth model” developed by De Gregorio & Guidotti in 1995 and Abdurrohman in 2003, which is also in line with the “supply-leading hypothesis.

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The model measures how indicators of financial development link with the economy turn to have an impact on economic growth. They derived the model as economic growth = f (financial development + macro-economic environment). They derived this function from the prominent pillar of neoclassical growth theory by giving more importance to financial development, expanding the factor “K” which represents both types of capital; financial and non-financial capital.

### **Statement of the research problem**

The main research problem of this study is to find out whether the empirical findings on the supply-leading hypothesis of which unidirectional association from FMD on economic growth is applicable to the Sri Lankan context considering both the aspects of depth and efficiency in financial markets in Sri Lanka. The main reason behind this problem is, that many of the recent studies also sum up the empirical results conveying that finance has strong impact on economic growth rate, but the problem is that all these studies were based on Europe or developed economies. Very limited studies use data from South Asian countries like Sri Lanka. Thereby this main issue motivated the researchers to study this topic in the Sri Lankan context.

Furthermore, the research interest is geared towards the issue of the current over-debt burden in the financial market with underdeveloped financial markets in Sri Lanka and slow or continues low-digit figures in Sri Lankan economic growth. The reason is that some scholars, such as Creel *et al.* (2015), found that an oversized financial development may result in negative externalities on the economy by increasing financial risk by financial instability and generating negative effect on economic wellbeing such as misallocation of resources, imperfect competition, economic instability, implicit recovery costs due to bailouts and bankruptcy in the whole system.

Also, some other scholars indicated that there is a negative relationship between financial market development and economic growth; For instance, Lucas (1988) stressed that promoting financial system development would be a waste of resources as it shifts the focus of more important policies such as labour and productivity improvement programs, implementation of pro-investment tax reforms, encouragement of exports to subordinate policies in the economy.

Therefore under the main research problem, an analysis of the impact of the degree of the financial depth towards the real GDP growth in Sri Lanka might assist economic and financial policymakers to lead Sri Lanka towards an economic expansion with the performance of the country’s financial market in a well- managed way in future by avoiding unnecessary depth in financial markets.

### **Research questions and objectives**

#### ***Main research question***

RQ: Is there an impact from FMD (both influenced by depth and efficiency of financial markets) on the economic growth in Sri Lanka?

This main research question is further extended according to the impact from financial depth measures and financial efficiency measures on economic growth, such as the impact of financial market depth on the economic growth in Sri Lanka. Also is there an impact of the efficiency of the financial markets on the economic growth in Sri Lanka?

Moreover, the study answers the following specific research questions: What is the impact of the degree of financial market depth on the economic growth in Sri Lanka? Is there a long-term impact/ prediction ability from FMD towards the economic growth in Sri Lanka? Is there a higher impact of non-financial market variables on the economic growth in Sri Lanka compared the impact of FMD variables?

### **Main research objectives**

To analyse the impact of FMD on the economic growth in Sri Lanka.

Both financial market depth and efficiency level in the financial market are will be taken into account when measuring the FMD. Therefore the main objective is further categorised into two sub-objectives, ‘to analyse the impact of financial market depth on the economic growth in Sri Lanka.’ and ‘to analyse the impact of the efficiency of financial markets on the economic growth in Sri Lanka.’

In line with the specific research questions, specific objectives will be as follows: ,

- ‘To assess the impact of the degree of the financial depth on the economic growth in Sri Lanka.
- ‘To check the prediction ability over the economic growth by FMD in Sri Lanka in the long run.’
- ‘To check whether there is higher impact from non-financial market variables on the economic growth in Sri Lanka compared to FMD variables.

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## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Neoclassical growth theory is the most prominent theory founded by Robert (1956) in economics, which highlights the three driving forces: labour, capital and technology toward the total production growth of a nation. Therefore this is the primary theory which explains the nexus going to be analysed. According to this theory, economic growth is a function of the capital accumulation of a country and its labour force, while technological change has a major influence on an economy. The growth function of an economy is derived as  $Y = AF(K, L)$ . "Y" represents an economy's GDP, "K" denotes its volume of capital, "L" denotes the amount of unskilled labour in an economy and "A" stands as the determinant level of technology. Increasing any one of these inputs shows the effect on GDP and, therefore, the equilibrium of an economy. These three factors of neoclassical growth theory contribute to growth in exponential terms.

The supply-leading hypothesis further supports this application, as the theoretical background reflects that many scholars have taken economic growth as a dependent variable against FMD parameters treated as independent variables.

One of the oldest findings on the “supply-leading hypothesis” was found related to England’s economy by Bagehot (1873). He identified that the financial system played a critical role in industrialising England through capital mobilisation. Furthermore, financial institutions in this market are the linkage between the surplus and deficit sectors of the economy through their intermediation. Schumpeter (1912) concluded that; the services provided by financial intermediaries are important for innovation and development. Also, he emphasised the importance of the banking system in economic growth; financial institutions support innovation and creativity and thus enhance future growth by identifying and funding productive investments.

Galbis (1977) and Fry (1978; 1980) indicated that imposing restrictions on the banking system, such as credit ceilings and high reserve requirements, negatively impacts the development of the financial sector, ultimately reducing economic growth. Also, McKinnon (1973), King & Levine (1993) found evidence for this supply-leading hypothesis and insisted that the financial intermediaries can obtain unavailable information to private investors and public markets about the quality of individual projects and, through that can facilitate the growth of a country by increasing the efficiency in the financial markets. This information also signals the economic actors to trade in the market by investing their savings. This effect will create an inflow into a nation’s economic cycle, and the economy’s circulatory expansion will be enhanced. Traders in financial markets evaluate future innovative projects and tend to invest in the most feasible projects by allocating nations’ resources efficiently.



Levine (1997) suggests that aiding risk management, improving liquidity and reducing transaction costs leads to better developments in financial markets and thus encourages investments. As per Levine (2004), the overall functions of financial markets, return up with associate in improving accumulation of capital, economical allocation of financial resources and improvement in technological capability, which are being crucial ingredients for the economic progression. Further, “it is the mechanism for effective mobilisation of domestic savings for productive investment, thereby alleviation of poverty especially for developing nations” (Ellahi, 2011).

The investigation on how Pakistan's financial development affects economic growth by Tariq et al. (2020) shows a U shape association between economic growth and financial development subject to a threshold value relating to Pakistan. This model revealed that there is a negative impact between economic growth and financial development if the threshold value exceeds 0.51 and it had a positive relationship only up to threshold value of 0.51.

Meanwhile, some authors ended up with bidirectional causality. Demetriades and Hussein (1996) test the long-term causality between the development of financial intermediation and the real GDP per capita growth by using a vector error correction test using 16 and 10 developing countries. These authors found a strong presence of a bidirectional causality and conducted that reverse causality is very low, from the growth to the financial performance. Ozturk (2008) investigated the same bidirectional causality in Turkey for the period 1975-2004.

The theoretical background not only suggests a supply-leading hypothesis but also an opposite view, namely the “demand-following hypothesis” as discussed by Patrick (1966). Demand-following hypothesis supports developing economic processes and ends up creating sound financial markets. Gurley & Shaw (1955; 1960; 1967) conducted an analysis and located that financial development may be a positive operation of real production growth. Goldsmith (1969) conjointly discovered that the magnitude relation of the establishment to production had driven an increase of financial gain and wealth in most of the thirty-five countries investigated from developed and developing countries. Zhang & Yin (2018) found an indirect impact towards regional financial development from corporate investment efficiency based on China using data from 2003 to 2016.

In contrast, some of the economists like Adusei (2012; 2013) insisted that FMD plays an insignificant and anti-growth role towards economic growth of South Africa for a time series data ranging from 1965 to 2010. Nwani & Basse Orie (2016) on financial sector development and economic growth nexus suggest an equally weak and negative relationship with evidence from Nigeria. The author concludes negative results are based on the nature of the economy of the country.

Majority of the studies being reviewed in Sri Lankan literature, most of them concentrated on the nexus between the stock market and economic growth. For instance, the study by Gunasekarage *et al.* (2004) examined the dynamic interrelations between macroeconomic variables and the stock market index in Sri Lanka using monthly time series data from January 1985 to December 2001. Wickremasinghe (2011) also confirmed the causal relationship between stock prices and macroeconomic variables such as the exchange rate, three months deposit rate, the consumer price index and GDP using empirical data related to Sri Lanka.

Amarathunga (2010) finalised that economic growth causes to financial development in the, long run, using time series data from 1960 to 2008 and concluded that there is no reverse causation.

Kumari, Vinayagathan and Abayasekara (2014) examined the post-liberalisation effects of financial development on Sri Lanka's economic growth between 1978 and 2012 and advises Sri Lanka's government to encourage the financial industry to raise the quality of its offerings instead of increasing the number of bank branches. Using vector error correction methodology, Perera & Ichihashi (2016) examined Sri Lankan data from 1952 to 2014 and discovered that financial development in Sri Lanka has a unidirectional impact on economic growth.

This concludes that previous studies in Sri Lanka and in other countries have different views on this relationship, and the majority concentrate on stock market developments (SMD) and they use different objectives and statistical approaches. Therefore, the researcher identifies an important research gap to be filled by further investigations into this relationship deeper concerning overall variables in the financial market not centralising to SMD and applying ARDL approach.

### ***Negative impact of higher financial depth on economic growth***

Though the positive effect of FMD on economic growth is the dominant view in the literature before the financial crisis, after the crisis in 2008, economists have done deeper assessments to analyse this relationship. For instance, Beck *et al.* (2014) insisted that an overperformed financial market may result in a misallocation of resources, instability, imperfect competition, rent extraction, implicit insurance due to bailouts and negative externalities from auxiliary financial services. Creel *et al.* (2015) found that the higher the level of financial depth in the European Union analysing proxy data from 1960 to 2011, the higher the financial instability and financial market effects are not favourable on economic growth, and it is generating a negative effect on economic wellbeing.

### ***Key dimensions of financial market development and economic growth***

Independent proxies are selected on the basis of World Developments Indicators (WDI). In 2019, the WDI database reports that the Majority of the with monetary authorities, foreign exchange companies, banks holding deposits, insurance corporations, pension funds, and other finance companies. In that report, IMF and World Bank use domestic private credit to the real sector by deposit money banks as a percentage of local currency GDP to approximate financial market depth. Further, to approximate the development extent of financial markets, they use stock market capitalisation as a percentage of GDP.

To approximate the efficiency of financial markets, they have used the total turnover value of shares traded during the period divided by the average market capitalisation for the period. Money and quasi-money (M2) were suggested liquidity indicator of the financial market as it increases the efficiency of the financial markets. The average annual percentage change in the consumer price index is the most accepted inflation index in a country which is a proper indication of influence on financial cost, which has an effect on efficacy in the financial market.

Being in line with the above indicators and with the support of empirical literature, five independent variables as indicators of FMD to Sri Lankan are selected for this study in natural log (Ln) form of each, namely total domestic credit and Percentage of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits as financial market depth proxies and Market Capitalisation, Broad Money (M2) as liquidity index and GDP deflator as the Inflation proxy for representing financial market efficiency factor.

The dependent variable is the change in real GDP in Sri Lanka. Relative change by concerning period to period itself as defined as the definition of economic growth as well as most accepted measurer by economist and based on that the economic growth to be measured using change in real GDP.

## METHODOLOGY

The research method was an analysis approach on secondary data. Monthly regular frequency sampling was used as the sampling technique, and the sampling size is about 138 observations gathered from 2008 January to 2019 June monthly time series data.

The main source of the data is the statistics published by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2018-2019). As the proxies of FMD, the Ln form was used for all variables: Total Domestic Credits, Market capitalisation of listed companies, and GDP Deflator as an inflator proxy. Broad Money Supply (M2) also served as the liquidity proxy in Model I. Model II employed the same variable, replacing Total Domestic Credits with the Percentage of Loans & Advances to Total Deposits. The Domestic Credit proxy in the first model is replaced by Ln% of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits in the second model in order to analyse the impact of the degree of the financial depth on economic growth. The reason to include this proxy in the second model is being a narrow concept than the Total Domestic Credit value, which is considered a broader indication that includes all debt sources.

To represent the non-financial market, the natural logarithm (Ln) form of the Private Sector Permanent Voting Interest (PSPVI) is employed as a proxy for capital injection into the economy from private sector. Additionally, the Ln form of Government Expenditure is utilised as a proxy to represent the government's contribution to non-financial capital formation in the country in the equations. Natural log form of Real GDP in Sri Lanka is using as the proxy of the Sri Lankan economic growth is taking as the dependent variable.

The research instrument was based on applying statistical analytical tools and the units of analysis were Sri Lankan financial market and the Sri Lankan economy. Auto Regressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) with an Error Correction Model and other diagnostic and stability tests are used to analyse the data.

In addition, this study is undertaken with the intention of distinguishing itself by the methodology application of the ARDL model to analyse the topic as it is not popular in application in Sri Lankan empirical studies relating to this topic and is advantageous over Engle-Granger and conventional Johansson cointegration.

Three types of tests are employed. First, the most widely used unit-root test, Dickey-Fuller test was employed to check the integration orders of the variables. Then the ARDL was applied to investigate the long-run relationship among the variables on each model, which estimates the long-run effects jointly with the short-run effects. Thirdly, the long-run ARDL Bounds Test for Cointegration is run for error correction. Finally, coefficient diagnostic tests were carried out to estimate the fitness of the model. Wald Test, Heteroscedasticity test and Serial correlation test (Brush & Godfray LM test) are commonly applied as residual diagnostic tests. In addition, to test the stability of the estimated model, Normality (Jaque-Bera test), Cumulative sum (CUSUM) and Cumulative sum of squares (CUSUMSQ) tests were undertaken. These diagnostic tests ensure that long-run and short-run estimates are free from serial correlation, misspecification, non-normality of the error term, and heteroscedasticity. Version 10 of the E-views statistical package was used to analyse the data gathered.

After the unit root test is performed, the basic form of an ARDL model is generated using the following base model of ARDL form:

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \alpha_1 Y_{t-1} + \dots + \alpha_k Y_{t-p} + \beta_1 x_t + \beta_2 x_{t-1} + \beta_3 x_{t-2} + \dots + \beta_q x_{t-q} + \varepsilon_t \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

All the variables used in the study were transformed into natural logarithmic form to avoid heteroscedasticity, and the re-written function represents the elasticity of the variables as below.

## Model I

$$\text{Ln (Real GDPt)} = \beta_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Ln (RealGDPt-1)} + \dots + \alpha_k \text{Ln (RealGDPt-p)} + \beta_1 \text{Ln (DCt)} + \beta_2 \text{Ln (MCt)} + \beta_3 \text{Ln (INFt)} + \beta_4 \text{Ln (M2t)} + \beta_5 \text{Ln (PSPVIt)} + \beta_6 \text{Ln (GEt)} + \epsilon_t \quad (\text{Equation 2})$$

## Model II

$$\text{Ln (Real GDPt)} = \beta_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Ln (RealGDPt-1)} + \dots + \alpha_k \text{Ln (RealGDPt-p)} + \beta_1 \text{Ln (L\_ADV\_DEPCOMBt)} + \beta_2 \text{Ln (MCt)} + \beta_3 \text{Ln (INFt)} + \beta_4 \text{Ln (M2t)} + \beta_5 \text{Ln (PSPVIt)} + \beta_6 \text{Ln (GEt)} + \epsilon_t \quad (\text{Equation 3})$$

Where, Ln (Real GDP t) is Economic growth,  $\alpha$  for constant figure,  $\beta_2$  for Ln Market Capitalisation of listed companies t,  $\beta_3$  for Ln Inflation index (GDP Deflator) t,  $\beta_4$  for Ln Money Supply (M2) t,  $\beta_5$  for Ln % of Loans & Advances to Total Deposits t,  $\beta_6$  for Ln Private Sector Industrial Production Volume Index t,  $\beta_7$  for Ln Government expenditure t and  $\epsilon_t$  for error term.

**Main hypothesis**

H00: There is no impact from FMD on the economic growth in Sri Lanka. (H01:  $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = 0$ )

The following two hypotheses were established for both perspectives of financial depth and financial efficiency.

1. H01: There are no impact from financial market depth on the economic growth in Sri Lanka. (H01: Coefficients of Ln DC, Ln L\_ADV\_DEPCOMB = 0)
2. H02: There are no impact from financial market efficiency on the economic growth in Sri Lanka. (H02: Coefficients of Ln MC, Ln Deflator, Ln M2 = 0)

**Sub specific hypotheses**

The following three hypotheses were tested to answer the sub-specific research questions and respective objectives.

1. H03: There is a positive impact from higher degree of financial market depth in Sri Lanka on the economic growth in Sri Lanka.

Model I - (H03: coefficient of the variable "Ln-Total Domestic credit" > 0) and

Model II - (H03: coefficient of the variable Ln-% of Loans & Advances to Total Deposits > 0)

2. H04: There are no any prediction ability over the economic growth in Sri Lanka by FMD in the long run. (H04: Coefficients of all Ln long run FMD variables= 0)
3. H05: Impact of Non-financial market variables on the economic growth in Sri Lanka is comparatively more significant than the impact from FMD variables. (H05: coefficients of the variables LnDC, LnL\_ADV\_DEPCOMB, LnMC, LnDeflator, LnM2 < coefficient of the variables LN\_PSIPVI\_CHANGE, LN\_GE).

The relevant alternative hypotheses are set as not equal to zero and greater or less than.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### Descriptive analysis

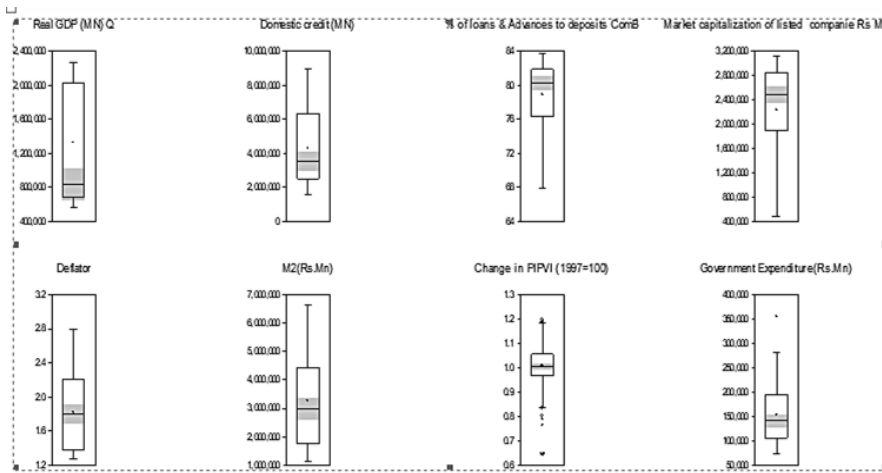
The summary statistics of the data set in Table 1 reveal central tendency, dispersion, skewness, and kurtosis. It is followed by a unit root test to avoid inheriting the non-stationary nature of times series data.

It is found that all the variables are highly volatile, having a coefficient of variance between 24% to 54%, except for the percentage of loans and advances to total deposits of commercial banks and change in PSPVI as highly consistent with a coefficient of variance around 4% to 9%. The P-value of the Jarque-Bera test check the normality of the data set. All the variables exceed the critical value for significance level (0.01). It concludes that no variable follows a normal distribution.

The Boxplot of individual series in Figure 1 provides the skewed direction. The shape of the tail relative to a normal distribution is the major indicator of Kurtosis. Except for the change in PSPVI, all the series have Kurtosis < 3. But for the data series, which percentage of loans and advances to total deposits of commercial banks, the market capitalisation of listed companies and government expenditure the values are more closure to 3 means that the series is closer to the reference standard which is considered a normal distribution. The percentage of loans and advances to total deposits of commercial banks and change in PSPVI and market capitalisation of listed companies are skewed to the left tail, whereas remaining series are skewed to the right. Outliers can be observed only in the non-financial sector variables.

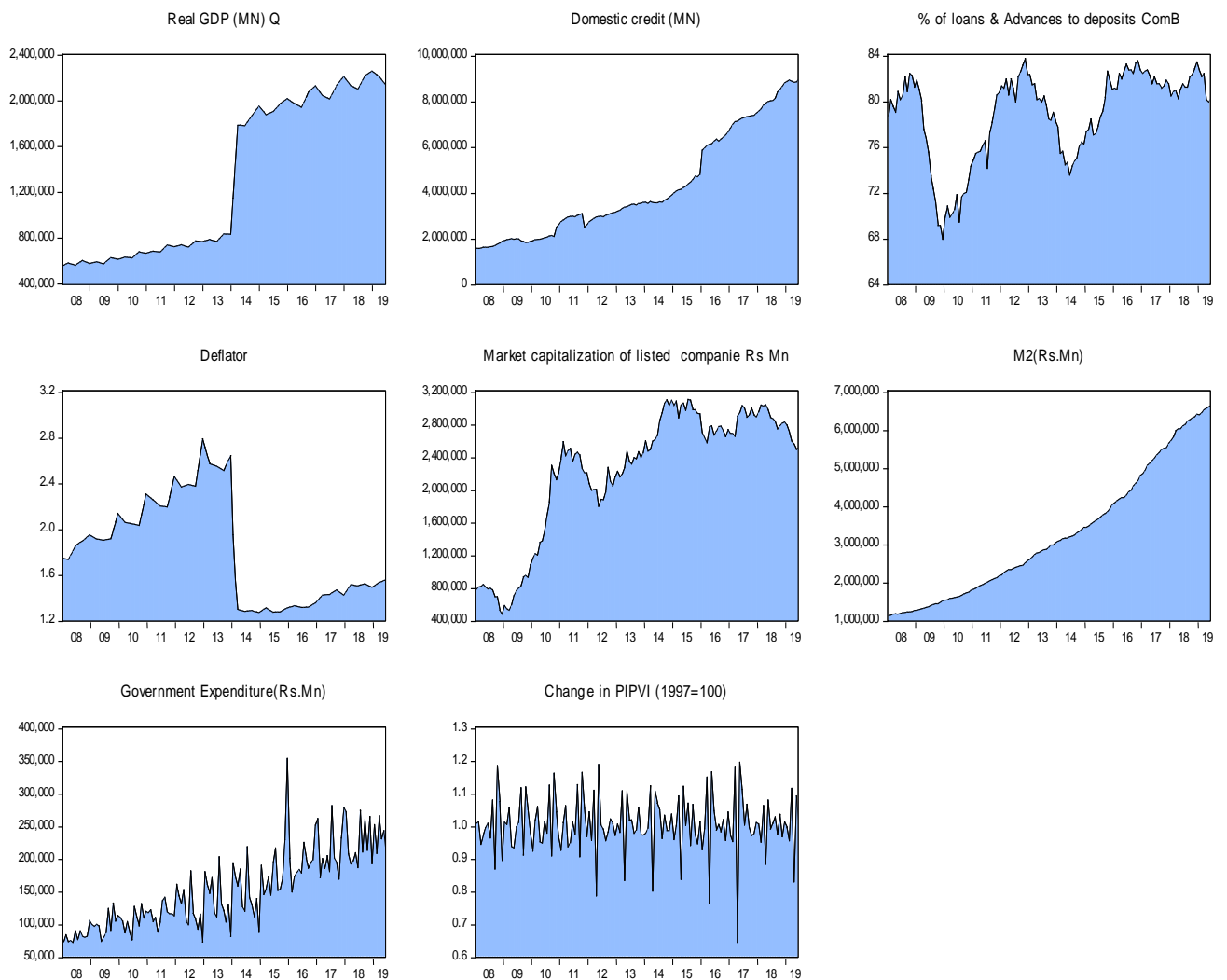
**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics

	REAL_GDP_MN	DOMESTIC_CREDIT_MN	LOANS_ADVANCES_TO_DEPOSITS_COMBANK	DEFLATOR	MARKET_CAPITALIZATION_OF_LISTED_COMPANIES_RS_MN	M2_RS_MN	GOVERNMENT_EXPENDITURE_RS_MN	CHANGE_IN_PSPVI_1997_10_0
Mean	1328162.	4291678.	78.87899	1.820164	2228379.	3270328.	153247.9	1.007213
Median	843722.0	3543369.	80.35000	1.799358	2481300.	2967475.	142067.9	1.005595
Maximum	2268801.	9003303.	83.80000	2.794150	3115300.	6661231.	354612.0	1.197558
Minimum	572711.3	1594084.	68.00000	1.277606	488800.0	1144361.	73536.00	0.646341
Std. Dev.	684095.0	2298384.	3.919602	0.456633	794116.0	1680477.	57847.81	0.085159
Skewness	0.147763	0.698782	-1.002342	0.370335	-0.939164	0.547908	0.685895	-0.561720
Kurtosis	1.129616	2.105092	2.999323	1.763937	2.538085	2.079537	2.971770	5.217180
Coefficient of variance%	51.50	53.55	4.96	24.72	35.63	51.38	37.74	8.45
Jarque-Bera Probability	20.61762	15.83576	23.10785	11.93955	21.51352	11.77638	10.82498	35.52352
Sum	1.83E+08	5.92E+08	10885.30	251.1827	3.08E+08	4.51E+08	21148211	138.9954
Sum Sq. Dev.	6.41E+13	7.24E+14	2104.769	28.56641	8.64E+13	3.87E+14	4.58E+11	0.993539
Observations	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138



**Figure 1:** Box plots of individual series

Source: Author calculations



**Figure 2:** Raw data series in area graph

Source: Author calculation

Figure 2 illustrates the graphical area view of each individual variable. The graph clearly depicts the unit root problem of the raw variables. Figure 3 illustrates the behaviour of each explanatory variable over the dependent variable to have an idea on the trend of relationship. For M2, The percentage of loans and advances to total

deposits of commercial banks and Total Domestic Credit have a positive long-term relationship with Real GDP growth in Sri Lanka. But the growth is limited to a certain extent of an expansion of these variables, and after that capacity, it has a negative impact on Real GDP in the short run, but again, in the long run, it has an ultimate result of expansion in the real GDP. It implies that domestic credit injection into the economic system affects to increase in economic growth in the near future, and thereby we can predict the future GDP growth in the country by looking at the current behaviour of the domestic credit level.

### ***Unit Root Test***

The results of the unit root tests at the level are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 for model I and II, respectively. As per the test results, the null hypothesis of unit root is not rejected by the ADF test at level I (0), except for PSPVI Change and Percentage of Loans & Advances to Total Deposits, and the remaining series are non-stationary in the level.

### ***The Optimal Number of Lags***

Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) is employed to choose the best ARDL model at the maximum lag length of 6 months. first the criteria getting the lowest figure of lag by employing both the AIC and the Schwartz Bayesian Criterion (SBC) to determine lag lengths individually. The Vector Auto Regression (VAR) test results for each series provide lag length criteria results with the lowest information criteria with AIC. Therefore, the AIC is set as the criteria to specify the lag length of the equations under constant and trend specifications.

**Table 2:** Summary results of Unit Root Test at Level – Model I

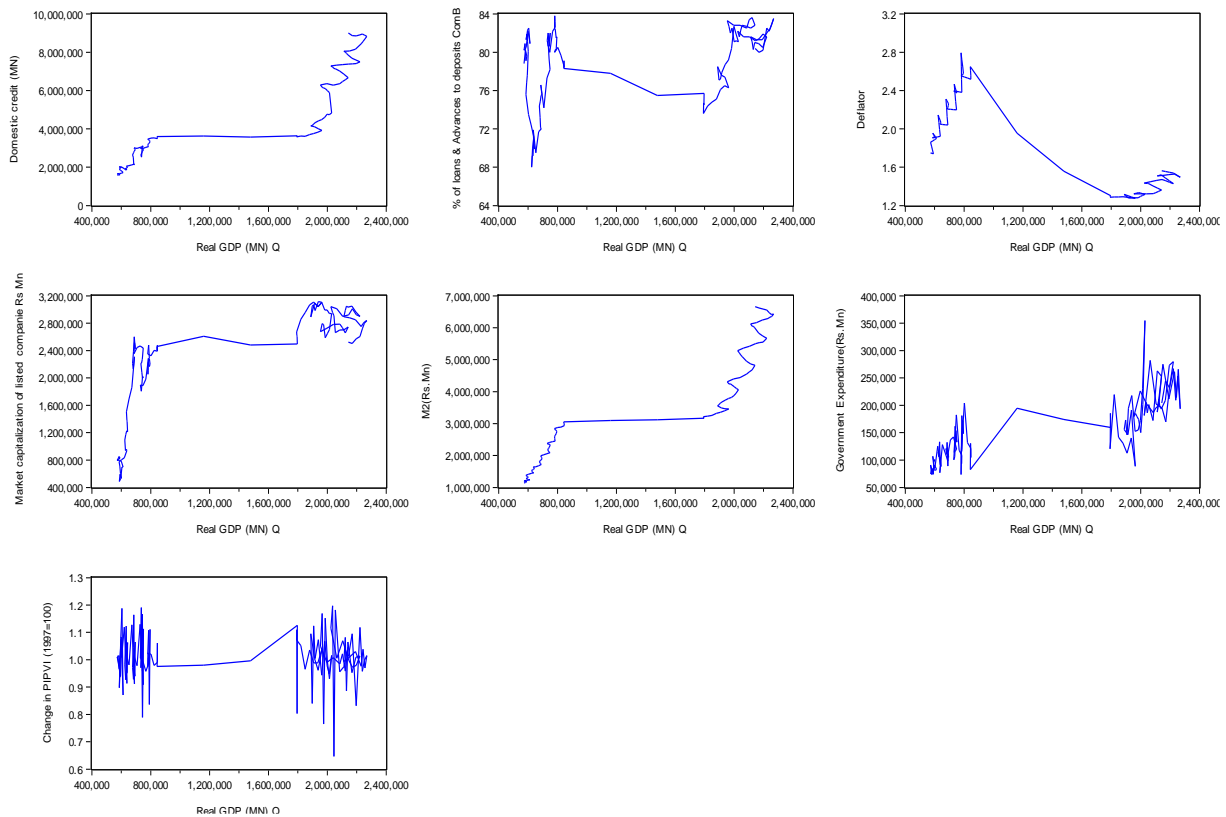
Series	Prob. at Level Form	Prob. at 1 <sup>st</sup> Difference	Order of Integration
LN_GDP_REAL_	0.5824	0.0061	I (1)
LN_DC	0.4518	0.0000	I (1)
LN_MC	0.5750	0.0194	I (1)
LN_DEFLATOR	0.5267	0.0025	I (1)
LN_M2	0.8877	0.0009	I (1)
LN_PSPVI_CHANGE	0.0001	-	I (0)
LN_GE	0.3041	0.0000	I (1)

Source: Author calculations

**Table 3:** Summary results of Unit Root Test at Level – Model II

Series	Prob. at Level Form	Prob. at 1 <sup>st</sup> Difference	Order of Integration
LN_GDP_REAL_	0.5824	0.0061	I (1)
LN_MC	0.5750	0.0194	I (1)
LN_DEFLATOR	0.5267	0.0025	I (1)
LN_M2	0.8877	0.0009	I (1)
LN_GE	0.3041	0.0000	I (1)
LNL_ADV_DEPCOMB	0.0001	-	I (0)
LN_PSPVI_CHANGE	0.0001	-	I (0)

Source: Author calculations



**Figure 3:** All independent variables vs. dependent variable in multiple graphs  
Source: Author calculation

### Auto Regressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) Estimates

Results propose an ARDL estimation for the univariate cointegration test, where the Real GDP (LN\_GDP\_REAL) is considered as the dependent variable, and all other variables are regressors. Under automatic test specifications, subject to maximum lag lengths 6 and 12 for the independent variable and regressors, respectively, tests were performed in terms of minimising AIC. This is the first stage of an ARDL estimation for the univariate cointegration test. The ARDL (5, 12, 10, 10, 10, 10, 0) and ARDL (6, 11, 2, 11, 8, 12, 11) are having the best level among the top twenty models under AIC.

Distributed lag Model I is generated with 99.9923% R-squared and 99.9843% of adjusted R-squared with a significant probability value of F-statistic. Its sum of squared residual stands at 00.2759% and also supports goodness of fit. R-squared and adjusted R-squared of the second model are 99.9944% and 99.9878% with a significant probability value of F-statistic. The sum of squared residual is reduced further in the second model to 00.2007%. Durbin-Watson stat in both models also stands at two, implying there is no autocorrelation. Accordingly, the Real GDP growth is affected by itself up to five months back figures in model I and six months back figures in model II. According to Model I, there are twelve months of back lags of Total Domestic Credit impact on real GDP growth and the value of replacing regressor in Model II, of which Percentage of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits stands as eleven in the model. It implies that the variations in Real GDP in Sri Lanka are the results of Total Domestic Credit capacity and the Percentage of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits in the country, and it has an impact around one year prior to the particular time concerned. The next three variables of FMD in Model I have explanatory power on the dependent variable distributed up to ten months back. PSPVI Change also seems to have ten months distributed impact over the dependent variable. According to Model II there are two, eleven, eight, and twelve months lag-back effects by the corresponding regressors.



According to Model I, government Expenditure is only having same-month impact on Real GDP growth in Sri Lanka. This implies that most government expenditure is incurred on the country's frequent monthly or recurrent activities, such as salaries and other monthly working capital requirements than for long-term production purposes. This kind of government involvement may not contribute directly to the accumulation of resources to enhance the real output in the island. But for the second model, the lag of government expenditure stands at eleven, and this model implies there is an eleven months back distributed impact on the Real GDP growth.

### *Coefficient Diagnostic Test*

The results of both Wald Tests for individual explanatory variables and Long-Run ARDL Bounds Tests for Cointegration provide evidence for short-run and long-run association from FMD variables towards the dependent variable in both models.

The long-run coefficient of the first model is illustrated in Table 4. All four regressors of financial market development have significant coefficients having non-zero values. Negative coefficients of Total Domestic Credits and GDP Deflator show the presence of a negative impact towards the dependent variable, while the other two financial market performance regressors are also statistically significant and have a positive long-run impact towards the real GDP. The Non-financial market regressors of both models have none zero coefficients, but both are not significant as FMD regressors.

The long-run coefficients of Model II, as in Table 5, also suggest four FMD regressors have significant coefficients with non-zero values. GDP Deflator only show a significant negative impact under this model towards the dependent variable while other three FMD regressors are also statistically significant and have a positive long-run impact on Real GDP growth. In the long run test, all the six coefficients of explanatory variables conclude expected theoretical conclusions with hypothesised signs except for Total Domestic Credit. Being consistent with theoretical literature, the Percentage of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits in Sri Lanka has a positive sign on real GDP. The long-run analysis reveals that a 1% increase in Total Domestic Credit leads to a decrease in economic growth by 0.28% in the model I, and a 1% increase in the Percentage of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits leads to an increase in economic growth by 0.98% as in model II. Also, a 1% increase in money supply triggers an increase in GDP by 1.57% as in Model I and 0.659% as in Model II.

**Table 4:** Long-run Coefficient - Model I

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
LN_DC	-0.281230	0.057071	-4.927757	0.0000
LN_MC	0.057237	0.016083	3.558793	0.0007
LN_DEFLATOR	-1.026946	0.022522	-45.59805	0.0000
LN_M2	1.576758	0.235524	6.694688	0.0000
LN_PVIPVI_CHANGE	-0.486189	0.465032	-1.045498	0.2999
LN_GE	0.010603	0.016768	0.632329	0.5295

Source: Author calculations

**Table 5:** Long-run Coefficient - Model II

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
LNL_ADV_DEPCOMB	0.987862	0.131183	7.530418	0.0000
LN_MC	0.185450	0.018497	10.02583	0.0000
LN_DEFLATOR	-1.068536	0.017715	-60.31796	0.0000
LN_M2	0.659421	0.229708	2.870689	0.0057
LN_PSIPVI_CHANGE	0.168824	0.483635	0.349072	0.7283
LN_GE	-0.042864	0.052529	-0.816012	0.4179

Source: Author calculations

The results equally indicate that increasing market Capitalisation by 1% leads to an increase in GDP by 0.05% in Model I and by 0.18% in Model II. This means there is a long-run relationship between FMD and economic growth.

According to Model I, PSPVI has a negative and insignificant impact on economic growth in Sri Lanka, while Government Expenditure gets a positive sign, but again, it is insignificant, which suggests that non-financial market variables of the estimated endogenous growth model are not a significant and primary source engine for economic growth in Sri Lanka. The same insignificant coefficients are generated for these two non-financial market indicators in Model II, but both signs have changed due to the overall impact has changed due to replacement of a new regressor. It is observed here that Government Expenditure has an insignificant negative impact in the long run. Government short-term investments or higher recurrent consumption expenses could be reasons for this negative association with Real GDP in Sri Lanka. PSPVI has an insignificant positive impact, which mean that private-sector industrial investments have been focused towards expanding long-term Real GDP in Sri Lanka. The most important observation is that all the FMD proxies, regardless of the sign or direction, have significant and comparatively higher value coefficients than non-financial market variables.

#### ***ARDL Error Correction Regression and Bound Test***

Under the Error Correction Regression output, the Coefficient of cointegration equation (CointEq (-1)) measures the speed of adjustment from short-run disequilibrium to long-run equilibrium or, in another way, measures the speed of convergence of short run towards the long-run equilibrium. Table 6 and Table 7 show the summary of test results of Error Correction Regression results for Model I and Model II, respectively.

The details of CointEq(-1)\* is the important statistical figure in this test output. The value suggested by the CointEq(-1)\* term in Model I is -0.326074 and -0.370822, which both are negative and statistically significant as the p-value is 0.0000. These statistics imply 32.6074% and 37.0822% of disequilibrium in the short run is corrected towards the long run monthly, as our time series are taken by monthly in Models I and II, respectively. It also evidences that only 32.6074% and 37.0822% of the gap between long-run equilibrium value and the actual Ln values of the dependent variable, Real GDP in this study, has been corrected in the two models, respectively. This is also said as speed of adjustment towards the long-run equilibrium. Accordingly, the estimated adjusted EC equations are elaborated under equations 4 and 5.

Model I

$$EC = LN\_GDP\_REAL\_ - (2.7320*LN\_DCGR - 9.1397*LN\_MC - 22.2550 *LN\_CCPI - 8.7729*LN\_M2 + 18.3474*LN\_PSIPVI - 5.7126*LN\_GE)$$

(Equation 4)

## Model II

$$EC = LN\_GDP\_REAL\_ - (0.9879*LN\_ADV\_DEPCOMB + 0.1855*LN\_MC-1.0685*LN\_DEFLATOR + 0.6594*LN\_M2 + 0.1688*LN\_PSIPVI\_CHANGE-0.0429*LN\_GE) \quad (\text{Equation 5})$$

**Table 6:** ARDL Error Correction Regression – Model I

Selected Model: ARDL(5, 12, 10, 10, 10, 0)				
ECM Regression				
Case 5: Unrestricted Constant and Unrestricted Trend				
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
CointEq(-1)*	-0.326074	0.046271	-7.046988	0.0000
R-squared	0.986737	Mean dependent var	0.010273	
Adjusted R-squared	0.975255	S.D. dependent var	0.040792	
S.E. of regression	0.006417	Akaike info criterion	-6.954902	
Sum squared resid	0.002759	Schwarz criterion	-5.626802	
Log likelihood	497.1588	Hannan-Quinn criter.	-6.415336	
F-statistic	85.94062	Durbin-Watson stat	2.038159	
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000			
F-Bounds Test		Null Hypothesis: No levels relationship		
Test Statistic	Value	Signif.	I(0)	I(1)
F-statistic	6.458981	10%	2.53	3.59
k	6	5%	2.87	4
		2.5%	3.19	4.38
		1%	3.6	4.9

Source: Author calculations

Error correction model I has been adjusted with a sound R-squared of 98.6737% and Adjusted R-squared of 97.5255% where F statistics are 85.94062, and its probability value is highly significant at 5% which stands at 0.000000. Equally, Error correction model II has been adjusted with a sound R-squared of 99.0352% and Adjusted R-squared of 98.0857% where F statistics are 104.3010, and its probability value is highly significant at 5%, which stands at 0.000000. Finally, with these statistical outputs, we can derive the final summary equations for two ARDL models, as in equations 6 and 7. Accordingly, these two cointegration equations are the unrestricted error correction models (ECMs) for the ARDL bounds tests.

**Table 7:** ARDL Error Correction Regression – Model II

Selected Model: ARDL(6, 11, 2, 11, 8, 12, 11)				
<b>ECM Regression</b>				
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
CoIntEq(-1)*	-0.370822	0.047114	-7.870674	0.0000
R-squared	0.990352	Mean dependent var	0.010273	
Adjusted R-squared	0.980857	S.D. dependent var	0.040792	
S.E. of regression	0.005644	Akaike info criterion	-7.209627	
Sum squared resid	0.002007	Schwarz criterion	-5.791486	
Log likelihood	517.2065	Hannan-Quinn criter.	-6.633480	
F-statistic	104.3010	Durbin-Watson stat	2.047793	
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000			
<b>F-Bounds Test</b>		Null Hypothesis: No levels relationship		
Test Statistic	Value	Signif.	I(0)	I(1)
F-statistic	8.006821	10%	2.53	3.59
k	6	5%	2.87	4
		2.5%	3.19	4.38
		1%	3.6	4.9

Source: Author calculations

**Summary of Co-integrating Equation - Model I**

$$D(LN\_GDP\_REALt) = \beta_0 + \alpha Ln (RealGDPt-1) + \beta_1 Ln (DCt-1) + \beta_2 Ln (MCt-1) + \beta_3 Ln (INFt-1) + \beta_4 Ln (M2t-1) + \beta_5 Ln (PPVIt-1) + \beta_6 Ln (GEt) + \sum_{i=0}^{j=5} \alpha_{1i} \Delta Ln (RealGDPt-1) + \sum_{i=0}^{k=12} \alpha_{2i} \Delta Ln (DCt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{l=10} \alpha_{3i} \Delta Ln (MCt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{m=10} \alpha_{4i} \Delta Ln (INFt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{n=10} \alpha_{5i} \Delta Ln (M2t-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{o=7} \alpha_{6i} \Delta Ln (PPVIt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{p=0} \alpha_{7i} \Delta Ln (GEt-i) + \epsilon_t$$

(Equation 6)

**Summary of Co-integrating Equation - Model II**

$$D(LN\_GDP\_REALt) = \beta_0 + \alpha Ln (RealGDPt-1) + \beta_1 Ln (DCt-1) + \beta_2 Ln (MCt-1) + \beta_3 Ln (INFt-1) + \beta_4 Ln (M2t-1) + \beta_5 Ln (PPVIt-1) + \beta_6 Ln (GEt) + \sum_{i=1}^{j=6} \alpha_{1i} \Delta Ln (RealGDPt-1) + \sum_{i=0}^{k=11} \alpha_{2i} \Delta Ln (L\_ADV\_DEPCOMBt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{l=2} \alpha_{3i} \Delta Ln (MCt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{m=11} \alpha_{4i} \Delta Ln (INFt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{n=8} \alpha_{5i} \Delta Ln (M2t-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{o=12} \alpha_{6i} \Delta Ln (PPVIt-i) + \sum_{i=0}^{p=11} \alpha_{7i} \Delta Ln (GEt-i) + \epsilon_t$$

(Equation 7)

Source: Author Calculations

**Residual Diagnostic Tests**

The Brush & Godfray LM test was conducted to test the serial correlation of the residuals of the two models. The test results are concluded in Table 8. The results of the Brush & Godfray LM test indicate that there is no error autocorrelation in both models. (Table 8). Prob. The Chi-Square of Obs\*R-squared of both models at two lag levels are too greater than a 5% significant level. Therefore we fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning there is no serial Correlation.

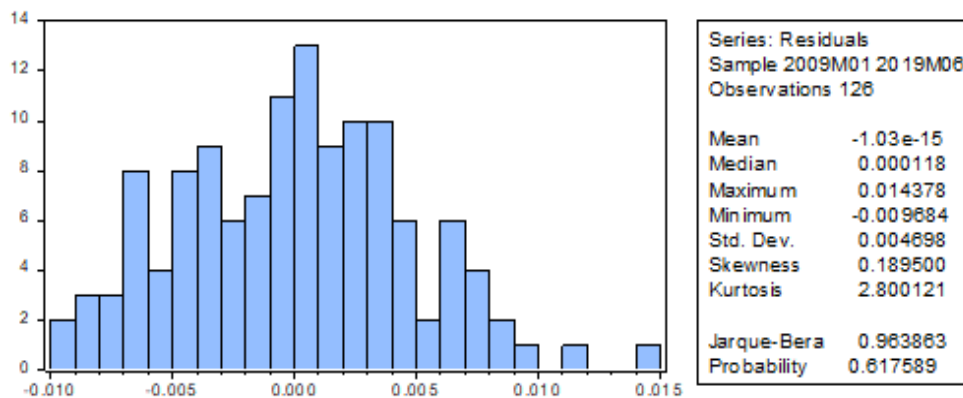


Figure 4: Histogram of Residuals – Model I

Source: Author calculations

Table 8: Serial Correlation Test Summary– Model I and Model II

Breusch-Godfrey Serial Correlation LM Test		
	Model I	Model II
F-statistic	0.173489	0.092590
Obs*R-squared	0.736673	0.422809
Prob. F(2,59)	0.8412	0.9117
Prob. Chi- Square(2)	0.6919	0.8094

Source: Author calculation

Table 9: Summary of Heteroskedasticity Test: Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey – Model I

Model I				Model II			
F-statistic	1.277898	Prob. F(64,61)	0.1683	F-statistic	0.827416	Prob. F(68,57)	0.7740
Obs*R-squared	72.17099	Prob. Chi-Square(64)	0.2260	Obs*R-squared	62.59078	Prob. Chi-Square(68)	0.6624
Scaled explained SS	15.22485	Prob. Chi-Square(64)	1.0000	Scaled explained SS	10.55121	Prob. Chi-Square(68)	1.0000

Source: Author Calculations

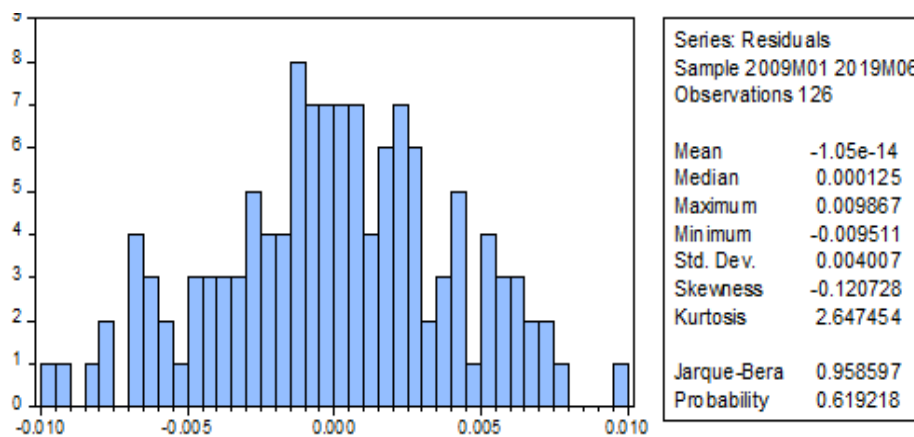
As the next residual test of coefficients, the test for Heteroscedasticity is tested to ensure all residuals have constant variance (homoscedasticity). In this thesis, we have used the Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey test for heteroscedasticity. According to the test results in below Table 9, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which has no heteroscedasticity as all the three probability values of F-statistic, Obs\*R-squared, and Scaled explained SS values are greater than 5% significant level for both models.

**Model Stability Tests**

Normality (Histogram with Jaque-Bera test) and CUSUM and CUSUM Square tests were undertaken to proceed with the model analysis to be stable. These test results indicated the model is free from misspecification and non-normality of the error term. As the first stability test for the model, the test for the Normality of the Residuals is used.

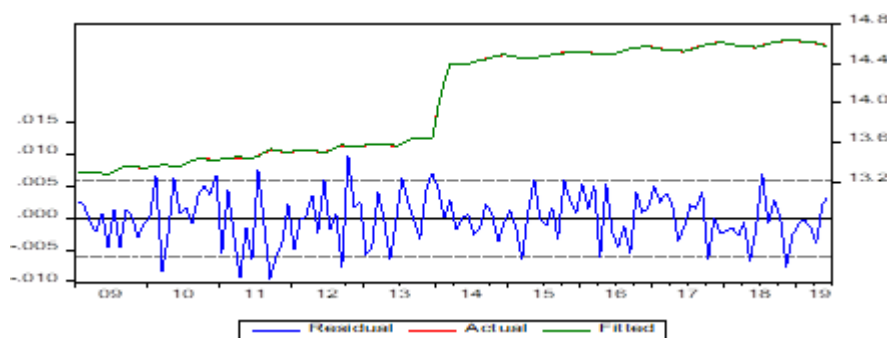
The Jarque-Bera test statistics for the normality of the residuals are used to ensure the normality of the models with their corresponding histograms. Figure 4 and Figure 5 provide the test outcome of the normality of residual of Model I and Model II, respectively. As the general econometrics defined, the histogram of both models generated are bell shaped, and the Probability of Jarque-Bera test statistics becomes significantly large, around 61% for both models. Therefore the test results fail to reject the null hypothesis of the presence of normality in residuals.

These plots repeat the results by providing evidence of behaviour of residuals that they are no specific trend and averagely distributed being actual and fitted are both inline without significant deviations. Predicted line has not fallen above or beneath any of the particular point. It means that the ARDL model is neither over-predicted nor under-predicted. The sum and mean of the residuals also lie within the error range of 0.5%. Further, support the soundness of the two models in explaining the dependent variable, Real GDP in Sri Lanka.

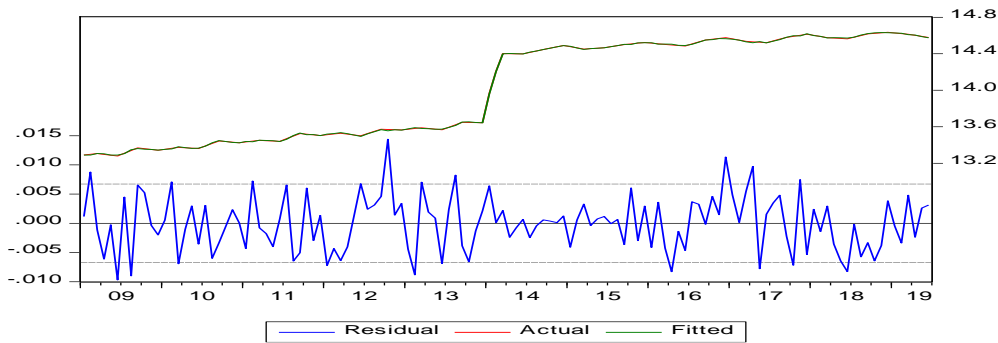


**Figure 5:** Histogram of Residuals – Model II  
Source: Author calculations

Actual, Fitted, and Residual Graph forms also can be used to have an idea of residuals. It displays the actual and fitted values of the dependent variable and the residuals from the regression in tabular and graphical form. Figures 6 and 7 are the corresponding Actual, Fitted, and Residual results in graphical form of the two models of the study.



**Figure 6:** Actual, Fitted, Residual Graph – Model I  
Source: Author calculations

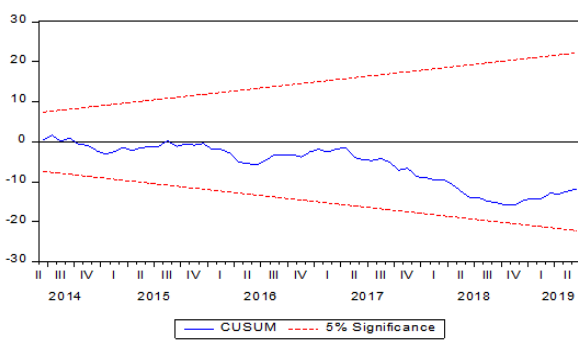


**Figure 7:** Actual, Fitted, Residual Graph – Model II  
Source: Author calculations

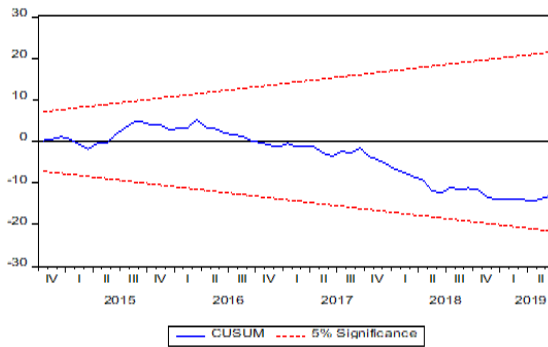
**CUSUM Test and CUSUMSQ Tests**

Finally, to test the specification error of the estimated ARDL models, the CUSUM test and CUSUMSQ tests were performed. The test results of the CUSUM test are illustrated in Figure 8 and Figure 9. Under the CUSUM test, the cumulative sum of recursive residuals is plotted against the upper and lower 95 % confidence bounds. The concept remains the same for CUSUMSQ. Test results of the both models are as in Figure 10 and Figure 11.

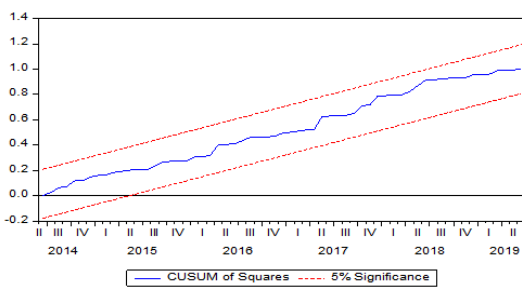
Since both plots lie inside the lower and upper bound at a 5% significant level, implying the two models’ stability is strong enough to apply in future related studies. The results of all plots fail to reject the null hypothesis of no misspecification in the models.



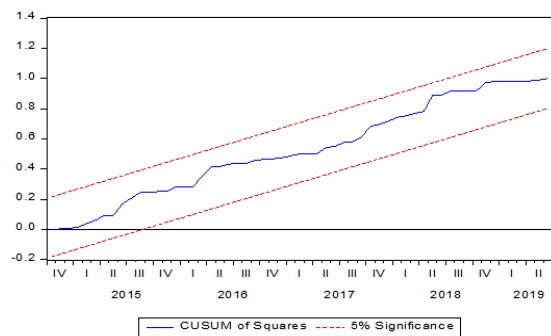
**Figure 8:** CUSUM test – Model I  
Source: Author calculations



**Figure 9:** CUSUM test – Model II  
Source: Author calculations



**Figure 10:** CUSUMSQ test – Model I  
Source: Author calculations



**Figure 6:** CUSUM SQ test – Model II  
Source: Author calculations

**Theoretical implications**

The findings have significantly confirmed the theoretical view, which sustains that FMD has a positive and significant impact on economic growth. The the study’s overall findings confirm the conclusions of the empirical

studies, that there is a supply-leading association from the exogenous component of financial market development on economic growth. Analysis rejects the  $H_{04}$ , as all the long-run coefficients of explanatory variables get coefficients other than zero at a 95% confidence level up to 12 lag period for financial regressors. This result collaborates with Tabi *et al.* (2011), who used a time series data of 35 years to show that financial development had a positive and significant long-run effect on economic growth in 2011. This is also consistent with the theoretical literature of Luintel and Kaln in 1999 which verified a long-run cointegration between financial development and economic growth. According to the long-run coefficients of explanatory variables in the overall two models, conclude the expected theoretical long run as well as positive directions around the one-year lag impact of FMD on real GDP growth in the Sri Lankan economy.

### **Empirical results**

The results of both models provide significant results to reject the null hypotheses. As the coefficients of FMD explanatory variables get values not equal to zero confirms that null hypotheses are rejected. First by rejecting  $H_{01}$  and  $H_{02}$ , indicate that from both financial depth and efficiency, which are the two perspectives of FMD have a significant impact on the economic growth in Sri Lanka in both models. Secondly by rejecting  $H_{04}$ , proves that there is a long-run prediction ability over the Real GDP growth by FMD of Sri Lanka.

To have a deeper review, as the results of model II depicts, the coefficient of the percentage of loans and advances to total deposits as a measurer of financial depth has a positive sign as predicted by the theory and is statistically significant at an even 1% significant level. This result also supports to reject the  $H_{01}$ .

This result is also similar to the long-run effect of that variable on real economic growth in Sri Lanka. It indicates that a 1% increase in the percentage of loans and advances to total deposits (financial depth) of Sri Lanka leads to an increase of 0.987862 per cent in aggregate output growth in Sri Lanka. This is the second highest positive impact among the explanatory variables, which implies that FMD is a proxy by the percentage of loans and advances to total deposits. The reason for facilitate supply of investible funds sources to the productive sector which influences overall output growth through increased economic investment levels. Loans and advances are the primary source of money creation in the country which inject the financial resources into the economic cycle through investments.

Conversely, the result of the Model I with replacing variable: Ln of Percentage of Loans and Advances to Total Deposits with Ln of Total Domestic Credit indicates the higher credit level is dangerous, and the credit burden on the economy or a higher degree of financial depth will result in a negative impact on real output growth in a country as Sri Lanka as the coefficient gets a negative sign. But still, the impact was reported as significant. To this end, the third research hypothesis, in which  $H_{03}$  is also proved as null, is rejected as per the results of the two models.

Further, PSPVI changes negatively and insignificantly determines economic growth in Sri Lanka according to the Model I, which signals as the credit level goes up in Sri Lanka, the financial distress has prevented the positive expansion of the real output as the real marginal revenue earned would be incurred to settle financial costs such as loan repayments and interest charges, penalty or default charge and other kind of debt service charges. In another way, the results indicate the rejection of the  $H_{03}$  and prove that there is no positive impact of the higher degree of financial depth in Sri Lanka on the growth of Real GDP in Sri Lanka. Further, this result is good evidence that Sri Lankan credit capacity in the financial market has exceeded the limit and thus has an unbearable risk to the Sri Lankan economy.

Results of Government expenditure in the Model I are consistent with literature as an endogenous growth model that incorporates government consumption or another way its economic involvement leads to economic growth, but the impact has become insignificant at a 5% significance level, and its supports to reject the  $H_{05}$ . Non-



financial market variables on Real GDP growth in Sri Lanka is comparatively significant than financial market development variables.

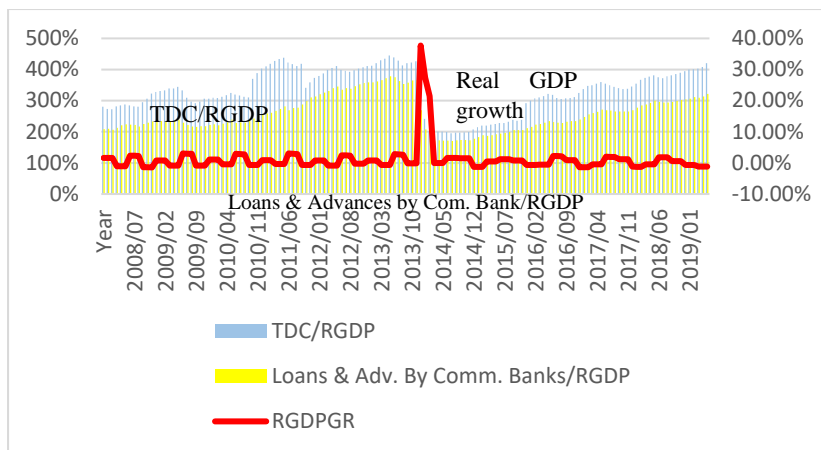
Finally, the results emphasise that domestic credit in model I or as in model II, loans and advances in the domestic financial system can have a highly significant impact on aggregate real output growth up to a certain bearable level until the economy can absorb the credit risk level associated with the credit level. Therefore the economy must be vigilant to maintain optimum level of credit capacity in the country to make it an engine for long-run economic growth. The capacity of credit generates negative distress towards the economy and results in a downward impact on the real output, as currently, Sri Lanka is experiencing.

Researchers have identified such a correlation is, however, positive, but only to a certain point in countries where the financial market is small or medium. They also conclude with the reasoning that too much finance can increase the frequency of fluctuates and leave countries unstable with lower real GDP growth.

Figure 12 shows the relationship between the levels of consolidated domestic credit, loans and advances to deposits of commercial banks and real GDP growth in Sri Lanka. The composite plot illustrates that the same negative impact on economic growth by increasing financial depth also applies to Sri Lankan economy. As the gap between financial depths between two explanatory variables increase, there is a negative and downward-sloping real GDP growth line and vice versa. It means that where the country is influenced by very high volumes of credit (as % of GDP) record, lower GDP growth rates. A negative impact of excessive credit capacity can be seen in the gap between consolidated domestic credit and loans and advances by the commercial banking sector only. At every point of the higher gap, it is apparent the real GDP growth rate has decreased, while if the gap is reducing, the growth rate has increased. The monthly data considered in the study indicates if the aforesaid gap of consolidated credits and loans and advances by the commercial banking sector exceeds the absorbable capacity in the country has created a repeated recession boom situation in short run also in GDP growth in Sri Lanka, which hinders the economic stability in the long run.

This kind of behaviour of financial depth is the aftermath of interest on the excessive level of debt being very high, and a lot of resources are then devoted to repaying debt. High debt service cost hampers economic growth in the short run as well as mainly over the long run. This will limit the inputs that can be used in stimulating output growth.

This is the scenario currently faced by many of the countries, even in the eurozone, with the global crisis, and this also assists in confirming this research results. Hence, this study has indicated sufficient to explain the negative long-term impact and short-term unstable fluctuation of real economic growth due to over performance of financial markets. Another way that excessive lending or too massive financial market may be a limiting factor towards the real growth of output.



**Figure 12:** Financial Depth vs. Real GDP Growth in Sri Lanka  
 Source: Author calculations

The next variable, Market Capitalisation of listed companies (Ln conversion), gives many interesting findings on the impact of capital market development on economic growth. All the coefficients for a lag variable of the market Capitalisation regressor (in Ln form) in both models are statistically significant (with p values not exceeding 0.001 or 0.05). Regarding Model I, a 1% increase in the market Capitalisation of listed companies will result in real GDP growth of 0.057237%. This value is second largest positive coefficient next to the Domestic Credit proxy in the second model, which is 0.185450 of positive impact for 1% growth in the market Capitalisation of listed companies. It means that a positive impact is seen with respect to capital market development.

It further suggests increases in Market Capitalisation lead to the acceleration of output. Hence, the study also confirms a strong positive impact of development in market Capitalisation of listed companies on the growth rate of GDP as evidenced in the empirical literature.

In addition, the models indicate a negative impact of inflation on economic growth in both ARDL models. Coefficient estimations in the study show that increasing inflation is an obstacle to achieve real output growth in Sri Lanka. As the prominent economist insisted, inflation may causes to increase the financial service cost and discourage financial involvement in the financial market. The coefficient of the corresponding proxy in Model I is about negative 1.026946, and in Model II is 1.068536. This indicates that a 1% increase of inflation effect can reduce Real GDP by respective percentages. The impact is significantly downward at an increasing rate. This finding emphasises the importance of pursuing anti-inflationary policies since, over a longer-run period, the impact of inflation on GDP growth is significantly negative at an increasing rate.

Next, as the proxy of liquidity, which indicates the efficiency in financial market, the supply of broad money (M2) has a positive and significant impact on economic growth in the short and long run. Through the financial market using intermediary institutes and financial market platforms, the stock of money available in country would be circulated towards the demanding sectors. Especially, commercial banking sector is involved in creating the supply of money through lending using the excess reserves which would finally facilitate the financing of economic activities in the short run and long term. The long-run coefficients reveal about 1.576758% and 0.659421% positive and significant increase over real GDP for a 1% increase in liquidity in the economy.

While all the above relationships are in line with the theoretical structural model, the latter non-financial market proxies are not always confirmed by empirical findings of other studies. The results point to a negative impact of Ln PSPVI on economic growth in Model I, while it is positive in model II. In both models, the significance of these coefficients is very low, where coefficients stand at 0.2999 in Model I and 0.7283 in Model II. This is because for many mild developing countries like Sri Lanka, the degree of private sector investments is rather correlated with foreign investments and a huge percentage of the income generated is not directed to local

real output value addition inside the country and rather directed in return to profit distribution of the non-resident investors as a fund leakage to external nations. This emphasises the importance of local investments and dependency of higher foreign investments will hinder economic growth though it is expected to generate positive externalities to the economy.

Finally, the impact of Government Consumption or Expenditure on economic growth turns out to be positive in Model I but negative in Model II. Though the positive impact is agreed with the empirical literature again, the result is not significant at a 95% confidence level with the lowest coefficient of 0.010603 among model regressors. This means a 1% increase in Government Expenditure would explain a very small portion, around 0.01% variation in the real GDP growth. In Model I the significance of the coefficient is 0.5295, and it is in Model II is 0.4179, which concludes a very lower significance for the impact generated. This result again provides evidence that as a proxy for the non-financial market, the change in Sri Lankan government consumption impact on output growth is very limited and insignificant when comparing the impact of financial market development proxies. The latter result of Model II is opposite to views about the beneficial effects of public spending. This indicates that Sri Lankan Government Expenditures are not directing towards value-adding economic activities and rather the expenses may involve highly on recurrent activities which would not lead to output growth as not incurred any capital nature investment or long term perspective. In Model II, generated coefficient suggested 1% increase in government expenditure has a negative impact of 0.042864% variation in the real GDP growth that implies further that if the government expenditure is not directed to expected public investment and rather incurs on short-term working capital investments, the public consumption does not lead to expected rapid economic growth rather declines the existing economic output level. The reason behind this can also be due to the shift of resources from productive sectors to non-prominent areas in the economy. Finally, it also supports the final research objective, emphasising that the significance of non-financial market variables is less than the significance of FMD on Real GDP growth in Sri Lanka by rejecting the  $H_{05}$ .

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## CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study used monthly time series data from January 2008 to June 2019 of Sri Lankan secondary data to examine the impact of FMD economic growth in Sri Lanka. The results of this study conclude that there is a long-run significant impact from FMD on economic growth relating to the Sri Lankan context. Even in the short-run, the impact indicates a strong positive impact on economic growth according to the ARDL model, which explained in lag period effect corresponding proxies of financial market performance measures. According to the ARDL model, the lag impact is around one year or twelve months back of each regressor on the Sri Lankan economic growth.

Further, the study highlights the overcapacity of financial activities in the Sri Lankan financial market has caused a negative impact on economic growth due to reasons such as increasing financial risk as the increase of financial distress, increasing misallocation of resources by exploiting the finance from prominent sectors and directing them on few sectors may increase in frequency of fluctuates in the financial market development. This kind of results in this paper emphasises the importance of optimum monetary policy, neither too lower nor too larger, as results suggest to pursue anti-inflationary policies because over a longer time period and as the final cyclical results would end up with the impact of inflation and then again real GDP negatively affected. Therefore the study guides to monitor optimum efficiency rather than overperforming in financial market is strictly required and emphasised to corresponding authorities in Sri Lankan economy.

Also concludes that an increase in liquidity can smooth the functions of the financial markets, and it will assist in efficient performance and finally be directed towards real production growth. As the inflation regressor gets the most significant negative effect on real GDP, complying with the economic theory as well, inflammatory situations would have a circular effect on the economy by demanding expansionary policies to be implemented such as salary increases. But finally, this leads to repeating inflation which causes a reduction in the efficiency-of

FMD as the transaction cost goes up. This scenario would hamper the efficiency in the financial markets in Sri Lanka.

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## RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

There can be limitations in this study related to model specification rather than linear function, ARDL application, variables concerned, and also being limited to the unidirectional impact of economic growth. For instances some authors have explained the U shape behavior of nonlinear function. They have insisted a squared relationship, with a parabola of which half is upward sloping and another half is downward sloping which is a limitation of this study. Also, it cannot be excluded that financial development reveals a bilateral causal relationship with economic growth or even a reverse causal link as reviewed in the literature. However, this is a different methodology of research and it is beyond the scope of our topic mainly. Researched period might be extended for further studies than the covered decade due to unavailability of series data and also different financial sector variables can be taken for the explainers than considered seven proxies in the study. Future related research could address these limitations and also apply the topic for various parts of the world as regions, unions or communities and finally emphasises an interesting area which needed to be researched further.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Strategic human resource management challenges in graduate development officer recruitment in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** Human resource management greatly influences the long-term performance of a corporation. While this has always been the case, the relative importance of HR has further increased in today's fast-changing, highly complicated, and uncertain corporate environment. Sri Lanka encounters a severe issue with hiring in the public sector, and employing graduate development officers has recently become increasingly complicated. They are categorised as insecure in their position due to the effect of human resource strategies in companies. In this regard, exploring the strategic human resource difficulties that influence the nominations of recent development officers is necessary, which mainly impacts graduates entering the business world for the first time. Within this context, a qualitative study was performed using data gathered through ten interviews. By using thematic analysis, the author aimed to determine the impact of strategic human resource practices in development officer appointments. Thus, we suggest the best possible ways of solving issues related to development officer appointments through practical strategies in human resources, such as the internal hiring process, knowledge or skill exams, and one-to-one and panel interviews.

**Keywords:** Strategic human resource practices, graduate appointments, thematic analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

The general public has numerous concerns about the ineffectiveness of the Sri Lankan government's overall development officer appointment scheme. The governmental programme for appointing development officers appears not to have adhered to a proper strategic or scientific analysis. Therefore, this study aims to examine the problems with government development officer appointments and recommend future tactics and methods to achieve the nation's short- and long-term goals effectively.

Companies in Sri Lanka are engaged in an open battle to find the best talent for their organisations despite the significantly increased number of Curriculum Vitae they have received over the past five years. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of good talent in the country. Due to the shortage of qualified candidates with the necessary financial expertise, good jobs are unfilled, and salaries are increasing dramatically (Welmilla, 2020).

Brain drain is another factor contributing to this issue, making it challenging for businesses to address crucial short-term skills gaps. Recruitment consultants are pressured to move the limited talent from one firm to another much more quickly due to the demand for vertical skills and corporations searching for a closer fit, which worries human resource managers. Companies are eager to pay top dollar to potential candidates to avoid their business stagnating in the face of a talent shortage; as a result, these companies have unintentionally contributed to a significant rise in salary levels. Today, a skilled employee can be just as valuable and difficult to replace as a devoted client. Various issues with Sri Lanka's education system also do not strongly emphasise the labour market requirements. Because they lack the requisite abilities in demand in the market, graduates from public universities cannot get employment in the private sector. Numerous examples in the real world disclose the various issues in the educational system (Stone & Deadrick, 2015).

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## Background

According to the available research, Sri Lanka should implement a new public management component to gain operational efficiency (Dissanayake & Devapriya, 2022). Administrators and politicians must adopt new behaviours and attitudes to implement these reforms while designing and implementing recent efforts to increase openness in public sector management. Still, it is debatable if there is the necessary political will for such changes (Samaratunge & Bennington, 2002). The Government of Sri Lanka prioritises public sector reform to reach operational efficiency. Reforming Sri Lanka's public sector governance framework is more important than ever to achieve economic and social development (Dissanayake & Devapriya, 2022).

The public sector experiences over-staffing appointments, which without considering strategic analyses, causes much trouble. Fernando (2022) states that the government might at least begin by proposing a voluntary retirement scheme and a method for some people to seek short- to medium-term employment abroad, starting immediately. He elaborates that we cannot put it off, since it may delay Sri Lanka's recovery process, further adding that the government's announcement of a recruiting freeze was a positive move, and continues: "As we examine reducing the size of the national budget, we must inevitably consider agency consolidation and overlap reduction. Many organisations struggle to find funding each year and have little influence" (Fernando, 2022). A recent public expenditure review of the public sector revealed the dispersion of funds across many agencies and, thus, of little impact (Fernando, 2022). Consolidation would ensure that they had more substantial effects and better budgeting overall.

Nevertheless, recent graduate appointments play a vital role in the country's economy due to the recent presidential election pledges, when electoral parties promised to offer graduates development officer positions in the public sector.

This research took the national graduate appointment programme as a case study to explore the strategic human resource (HR) challenge in that execution. Only a few studies have investigated this programme, primarily focusing on finding job satisfaction among recruits. The authors' literature search confirmed the absence of studies analysing the effectiveness of the government's graduate job scheme (Nanthagopan & Vivek, 2021). Thus, studies must determine how the government's development officers are appointed and how this programme is implemented in HR practices (Nanthagopan & Vivek, 2021). A strategic human resource management (HRM) process helps the HR department maximise the potential of its workforce through strategic planning, talent management, leadership development, organisational design, and performance management (Wright & Nishii, 2007). Therefore, this study addresses the gap in development officer appointments and strategic HR practices challenges involved in graduate appointments. This investigation is an initiative to explore issues at the strategic HRM (SHRM) level in development officer appointments.

## Case Study: the programme to employ unemployed undergraduates

This opportunity provides unemployed graduates and diploma holders a way to find work. The programme aims to establish an environment where all young people may meaningfully and rationally contribute to sustainable development, fostering a work culture that benefits the nation. The programme is organised and executed by Sri Lanka's former President's policy statement, 'Saubhagyaye Dekma'. The potential candidates must have completed a degree/diploma programme approved by the University Grants Commission before 31 December 2019, and they should be below 35 years of age. They implemented this programme by offering many graduate development officer positions. It claims that appointments are based on the district, and the initial appointments must serve a minimum of five years. These appointees would receive a 12-month training and a monthly stipend of LKR 20,000 (Sri Lanka, Presidential Secretariat, 2020).

## **Problem statement**

This programme, implemented since 2019, has now been operating for over three years. The government's graduate appointment procedure has challenging SHRM implications. First, the graduates are appointed to the divisional secretariat offices before being employed to fill open government positions. In addition, some inadequate and unnecessary appointments are accepted by the government, without a proper employee recruitment mechanism. These artificially created government posts pose several practical issues (Nanthagopan & Vivek, 2021). This study explores whether this graduate appointment programme followed a strategic HR process before implementing the programme, how development officers face challenges from an HR perspective after the appointment, and what issues arise from this situation.

Reforms are going to be quite painful, so policymakers seem reluctant to push hard for reforms as they are scared that the citizens' frustration during the reform period may dilute the political capital they enjoy. (Fernando, 2022)

## **Research Objective**

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate the strategic HR challenges in recruiting, creating job happiness, and elevating output in development officers in Sri Lanka and make recommendations to improve the current situation.

## **Research Questions**

Three research questions are investigated:

- Does the existing SHRM cater to the effective recruitment of graduates to the development officer appointments?
- What are the SHRM challenges in development officers' appointments in Sri Lanka?
- What strategies can overcome SHRM challenges in creating job happiness and elevating output?

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## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Here, we review scholarly research papers and empirical literature that help investigate the research.

### **Strategic human resource management**

Despite a recent paradigm shift in many firms from an employee advocate model to a strategic business partner approach, some still view HRM as not contributing value to enterprises. This paper briefly discusses the difficulties faced by master's and doctoral-level HR graduate education and emphasises the importance of producing HR specialists and managers who understand the value and significance of HR's contributions to achieving strategic organisational outcomes as a strategic business contributor (Wimbush, 2008).

A company's HR department is tasked with planning staffing needs; and discovering, vetting, selecting, and hiring job applicants. HR then involves training and appraising employees. This study primarily focuses on recruitment since the challenges due to poor recruitment and other SHRM practices are highlighted. HR is critical in the twenty-first century to help businesses adapt to a quickly changing business climate and the increased demand for qualified workers. The recruitment process may be "a means of attracting and finding potential employees to fill open positions inside the firm". The HR recruitment process aids in hiring people based on their work ethic and attitude, which are crucial for achieving company goals (Beer, 2022).

The HRM process begins with the discovery of a job opening within the company, followed by an HR department analysis of the position's requirements, review of job applications, screening, shortlisting of desirable candidates, and hiring the best candidate for the post. SHRM covers the typical HR tasks of recruiting, vetting, interviewing, and employing workers but also collaborates with the overarching company strategy to succeed. However, even if the candidate is a graduate, the recruitment officer in charge should consider the company's perspective and hire the correct candidate based on their general capabilities and not paper qualifications (Lall, 2018).

Strategic HRM planning offers many advantages, e.g., providing a sense of direction to improve how work is accomplished, keeping employees focused on organisational goals, and providing a strategic focus to guide training and development initiatives. There are many additional factors, such as giving tools to leaders to help focus and implement their strategic initiatives, avoiding disruptive, costly surprises that interfere with achieving goals, addressing key issues on time to avoid crises, and encouraging employee productivity and overall organisational success.

Workforce strategy includes workforce planning as a key component, supports organisations' long-term business objectives, and helps them meet their future skill needs. In contemporary fast-changing economies, workforce factors need to align with each level of planning, and it is necessary to ensure that the organisation is building adequate capacity to adapt to new trends and take advantage of emerging possibilities. This has sparked recent interest in this topic and aligned with current HRM mission and goals. The most responsible task in every company is planning, organising, and managing the HR department. The HR should follow the department's planning, organising, and management by hiring the correct person for each position. Therefore, there might be issues when hiring new graduates into the workplace. Hence, graduate recruitment must consider the company's best interest though the company hires fresh graduates for lower positions (Wilson, 2014). Thus, HR practitioners must ensure the effects of programmes on each department's conduct. However, the many issues reported with development officers' appointments indicate inadequacy and unsuitability. This signifies the failure of the whole recruitment process, including planning.

The hiring process is part of the HR planning process, which cannot be completed without careful strategic planning. A definition of recruitment is 'a procedure that creates a pool of qualified job candidates for the business to run their operations effectively, and profiles need to match with candidate selection through an effective strategic planning process. Companies must execute adequate staffing strategies and forecast to ascertain their required employees before hiring. The process of appointing development officers must consider the qualifications and the organisation's needfulness. Employers generally consider graduates' intelligence as an indication that they are amenable to training for more challenging jobs—this was the typical reason for hiring graduates. Some related themes are the ability to conduct research, learn or grasp something new, and do this fast. Some companies believe in a direct link between the skills needed to study and pass tests and the skills required to learn new things on the job (Pollard *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, creating programmes to improve the quality of the work environment, developing talent and future leadership, and conducting motivational programmes will enhance the efficiency of hiring and paying salaries to graduate appointments.

The government of Sri Lanka fulfilled the employment needs of the public sector through the 2004 and 2012 graduate schemes. Graduates are thankful and appreciate the support extended to them by the government by granting permanent employment to 51,420 graduates in the state sector as development officers. This is the highest number of graduates recruited to the state sector by a government in Sri Lankan history. The graduate trainees recruited in 2012 received a monthly allowance of LKR 10,000 during their training period. Of the total recruited, 16,478 were assigned to the Ministry of Economic Development to propel the government's apex project, the 'Divi Naguma' Development Project. Most graduates were recruited to divisional secretariat offices among the

25 districts of the country (Vithanage, 2017). Sixty thousand graduates were recruited to the public sector in 2020, extending the graduate employment drive to create a culture of 'Rata Wenuwen Wada' ('Work for the Country') as envisaged in the 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' policy statement (*The Morning*, 2020).

With the programmes mentioned above, public sector employees now constitute about 19.10 per cent of the total employment in Sri Lanka. Although the public sector has grown in numbers, many people today query whether its quality has improved as expected. International researchers say Sri Lanka's public service has expanded exponentially due to political and administrative negligence. Currently, many government institutions in the country are overstaffed. The ratio of public servants to citizens has changed from 1:113 when Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948 to 1:13 today. The international accusation exacerbates the problem that the public service, expanded due to irrational recruitment in the past, has now become a burden to the country (Ameen & Keppetipola, 2022).

Another critical factor less considered in the public sector is environmental scanning in SHRM, specifically in HR planning. An organisation's entire environment can be divided into two major categories: external and internal. Bryson & Edwards (2022) define environmental scanning as "internal communication of external information about issues that may influence an organisation's decision-making process". Analysing the external environment helps an organisation to understand its external environment. Hitt *et al.* (2006) noted that matching the firm's understanding of the external environment with knowledge about its internal environment helps form the company's strategic intent and mission and create strategies.

### **Procedures for appointing Graduate Development Officers**

Various countries employ different procedures. The Sri Lankan context is much more diverse than other countries.

#### **European context**

Countries have distinct procedures when appointing graduates to the available job vacancies. The UK's approach is somewhat different. After completing academic programmes in the UK, a 'graduate visa' allows staying there for at least two years (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, local and foreign graduates adopt strategic HR practices accordingly. Notably, strategic human resources played a significant role in promoting the hiring of recent graduates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this discussion, the authors highlight the critical ramifications of COVID-19-era strategic HR research.

First, the authors emphasise the need for a broader understanding of how new work experiences affect employees' attitudes and behaviour in the post-COVID era (Brundha & Chaturvedi, 2021). In every country, strategic HR practices became challenging when appointing graduates. According to the classification provided by the Innovation Union Scoreboard, we studied cultural dimensions in all EU nations, assuming that countries have successfully adopted innovative firms' strategic management of human resources (Erasmus, 2018). That means EU countries consider cultural dimensions when appointing graduates to the workplace. Hence, there are various concerns when adopting a recruitment process in a company. Thus, strenuously considering strategies and challenges is vital to maintain a successful recruitment process. Research conducted by the Institute of Employment Studies in the UK revealed strong evidence of new graduates increasingly entering non-graduate jobs, especially in the hospitality and retail sectors and public administration. This trend was evident before the 2008 recession – especially from the mid-2000s onwards – but was considerably amplified by it. However, past research shows that most graduates, over time, achieve the appropriate level of employment. Graduates from less advantaged communities appeared to fare worse in the labour market. They were more likely to return immediately or soon after graduation to non-graduate jobs in larger employers, where they may have worked during or before their studies (Pollard *et al.*, 2015).

## Sri Lankan context

Thanks to the government's programmes, all unemployed graduates and diploma holders can now find work. This programme aims to establish an environment where all young people may meaningfully and rationally contribute to sustainable development, fostering a work culture that benefits the nation. The programme follows the policy statement, 'Saubhagyaye Dekma'. Before 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, potential candidates should have completed a degree or diploma programme approved by the University Grants Commission. On that date, they should be less than 35 years of age. The applicant must not have been employed for the three years immediately before this process. They must be permanent residents in the area under the Divisional Secretariat to which the application is submitted (Sri Lanka, Presidential Secretariat, 2020). However, the goal is to provide vacancies for graduates who have completed their degrees.

The Unemployed Graduates Association in Sri Lanka continuously points out the hiring procedure's problems. According to Article 2 (A) of the government-issued circular, internal and external degree holders should receive equal treatment. However, the administration divided this into internal and external, which caused perceived unfairness to many internal degree holders. These given appointments have many challenging HR issues (Serasinghe & Opatha, 2013): e.g., low salary, vacation issues, and graduate student research appointment interruption. That will affect graduate appointments in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, strategic HR practices should adapt accordingly to avoid such disruption despite the challenging nature of strategic human resources.

According to Sri Lanka's National Human Resource and Employment policy, the public service only marginalises employment as a direct employer, which is confined to a few categories. The policy states that the attraction of the public sector for job seekers is the social status of the former and its job security. This may have fuelled the demand for government employees from university graduates (Vithanage, 2017).

According to the government gazette in 2012, the recruitment method of graduates is as given in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Graduate recruitment criteria (2012)

Criteria	Qualification required
Grade of recruitment	Grade III
Educational qualifications	A degree from a university recognised by the University Grants Commission
Professional qualifications	Not Applicable
Experience	Not Applicable
Physical fitness	Physical and mental fitness to serve and perform the post's duties anywhere in the country.
Employment status	Present an affidavit/ oath to prove that he/she is an unemployed graduate, and the Divisional Secretary of the Divisional Secretariat in which the candidate resides permanently shall certify the same.
Minimum age limit	Minimum 21 years; [Maximum 35 Years]

The candidates from whom applications are called by public notification shall be recruited based on the marks obtained at a structured interview by a board appointed by the government authority officers. No written examination or professional test is required (Vithanage, 2017).

## Strategic human resource challenges

The relative importance of HR has further increased in today's fast-changing, highly complicated, and uncertain corporate environment. It has also evolved the difficulties of HR in hiring graduates. According to LinkedIn, graduates or highly qualified candidates with educational credentials consider the employer's brand before applying for a position. They will neither apply nor accept the job offer if they dislike what they see. A survey by Corporate Responsibility Magazine disclosed that 75% of respondents would not take a position with a company with a poor image, even if they were unemployed (Sabina & Colwell, 2018). Talent scarcity is the most significant

hiring difficulty we encounter today. The HR department's top priority is to hire the appropriate person, although the candidates are graduates. According to many studies, 87% of HR professionals reported "little or no qualified applications" for the positions they wish to fill (Ahmad, 2022).

Employers who aim to fill positions with exceptional candidates must explore outside their staff members' social networks and local areas due to the shortage of eligible applicants. Even though the candidate is merely a graduate, they must figure out a strategy to broaden their candidate's reach to uncover those elusive 'hidden gems'. Thus, that will also be challenging HR practice from the graduates' point of view (Saul, 1987).

Finding suitable job candidates is the most severe difficulty for businesses. Going through several applications from applicants unfit for their vacant positions is a waste of their valuable time, which may reduce the number of graduates hired during the period.

Suitable applicants are available, but HR professionals waste time and effort looking for them without a successful talent-sourcing plan. This produces disappointing results. Finding top candidates among the graduates and obtaining their resumes and contact information is challenging for recruiters. HR professionals must consider all the above when appointing graduates (Nanthagopan & Vivek, 2021). Thus, all considerations challenge the graduate to expect an appropriate job vacancy. Fostering innovation in the organisation is one of the organisation's aims when hiring any person. This is disadvantageous for graduates because they get fewer opportunities. On the other hand, this is a challenge for the HR department.

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## METHODOLOGY

The researchers evaluated the strategic difficulties that arise in graduate appointments to investigate the research questions and objectives derived in this study. Based on that, researchers thoroughly reviewed the strategic difficulties associated with graduate appointments. It should be emphasised that this study uses earlier research to adapt the qualitative research approach, as indicated in many research articles cited in the literature review. This paper highlights the proper analytical method for determining if graduate positions present strategic obstacles.

This paper is organized into three sections: (1) the information sources, (2) research strategies, and (3) analytical equipment. The data section describes the data gathering, the research plan, and the method used. The second part provides details about the research methodology applied throughout this study, and the final section presents the tools and procedures for evaluating the collected data, serving as the foundation for this study's in-depth analysis. The analytical model estimates and interprets the results to achieve suggested goals. This study adopted qualitative in-depth interview to explore strategic HR challenges in graduate development appointments.

### Research approach

Exploratory research is conducted in situations with little understanding of the phenomenon. The study aims to generate novel insights to help clarify a subject, inform future research, evaluate tactical challenges, and better understand graduate appointment procedures (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021a; 2021b). A qualitative study was the best approach for resolving the initial research difficulties. The adaptability of qualitative techniques, including document analysis, observation, and interviewing, allows for in-depth subject investigation. The open-ended research topics that define exploratory research can also be addressed using these methodologies. However, this study is based on qualitative research, and the researchers aimed to identify the challenges attached to graduate appointments through thematic analysis (TA).

Case studies are one of the most prevalent ways to review a person, a group, a community, or an institution. Researchers often utilise the "bounded theory," a method that limits a case study's time or space. For the case

study, the researcher may use information from many different sources, such as interviews, records, and direct observation. All people picked as participants must have something in common, which means they must all have a direct or indirect link to the study issue or subject examined. After collecting all information, the researcher will examine the data to find common or essential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, this study used a qualitative approach of an inductive nature. Hence, the researchers began with specific observations, In-depth interviews and measures found through the collected data and moved to detect themes and patterns in the data.

### **Data sources**

The research strategy was based on interviews and document surveys including journal reviews. The purpose was to perform an explorative study because the research question had not been studied previously. Exploratory research is a research design that investigates questions that are not profoundly addressed previously. Exploratory research is usually qualitative, and this study collected information from Ten development officers by using purposive sampling and conducting in-depth interviews to explore ground realities of the development officers .

The data collection process acquired the following data categories:

- (1) Journals of observation and inquiry
- (2) Ten interviews

Secondary sources such as HRM, public affairs, and economics journals were consulted throughout the research study. Journals that provided the most citations were in the European setting due to the shortage of relevant literature in the Sri Lankan context. The primary data was collected. Recently recruited graduates (under the Government Graduate Scheme) were interviewed to obtain first-hand information.

Thematic Analysis is consistent with these approaches of data collection, which seek to delve into the experiences, meanings, and events through oral interviews and textual data (journal entries) written by those experiencing them. Even though data were electronically stored in an Excel spreadsheet, the researchers used specific tools such as pens, highlighters, and post-it notes to review and evaluate the printed data (Maher *et al.*, 2017).

### **Data**

Qualitative data collection frequently relies on interpretation, thus suggesting that the data require numerous explanations. This is because massive quantities of high-quality evidence are gathered frequently. According to the study findings, thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) is a specific technique that helps researchers make various links between the data and the evolving social environment. TA is considered the best technique for any study that seeks to apply interpretations. It gives data analysis a methodical aspect and enables the researcher to connect a topic's frequency analysis to study the text's overall content. This increases the precision and complexity of the research while enhancing its importance. Qualitative research necessitates comprehending and gathering many elements and facts. TA provides the ability to identify the possibilities of any topic broadly.

### **Thematic analysis**

TA interprets several data sources as a qualitative analytical tool for practitioners' inquiry. Special attention is paid to the inductive and deductive coding processes used in TA. The codes were constructed by utilising a "bottom-up" and "top-down" technique to uncover themes, with the constructivist epistemology serving as the framework (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Firstly, after familiarising ourselves with the collected data, we should generate initial codes and begin organising available data. Coding breaks down large amounts of data into manageable meaning units. There are several coding techniques, and the one chosen will depend on the viewpoint and study objectives. Answering specific research questions and analysing and considering the data are essential in this phase. Thus, this analysis was theoretical rather than inductive. However, regarding strategic HR challenges in graduate appointments, the codes are designed based on candidates' nature and capability because this study's initial aim is to analyse key strategic HR challenges in development officer appointments.

Table 2 provides the extract codes relating to the data set. Each code transmitted via the data set was assigned a specific topic. A "theme" is a pattern that captures a significant or fascinating part of the data or research subject. The limited size of the data set may cause much overlap between the coding stage and this stage of identifying probable themes. At the end of this phase, the codes had been organised into broader themes that may have anything to say directly about this study subject since identifying the strategic HR constraints in development officer appointment is a requirement of the proposed study question. The answers to the interview questions determined the challenges. In addition, challenges from the employee's point of view are pointed out because this investigation can further implement proper recruitment of development officers.

### **Application of thematic analysis**

Table 2 signifies a few SHRM challenges in the recruitment process of development officers. The standard narratives obtained through the interview are evidence of undistinguishable SHRM practices. As government officers, it is suitable to fetch the right talent at the right time. That means filling the vacancy without the correct employee may challenge the company and employees seeking a job with relevant experience and educational qualifications.



**Table 2:** Themes and codes

Theme	Code	Common narratives
Strategic Human Resource Challenges	Fetching the right talent at the right time (failure in career planning)	No. Not like that. I worked in the income tax department before I came here; I have full knowledge of income tax department works. Here I am learning. They gave without looking at qualifications. I have first class in engineering, but now I am working in a hospital as a development officer even though I do not have any job description, and daily, they send filed work and send me for file collection.
	Improper strategic HR planning	I do not know what I am doing even though my degree is 100 per cent not aligned with what I am doing.... fed up... emotionally unbalanced, sir.
	Less planning on compensation and benefits	I am working as a development officer away from home. I am just getting Rs. 20,000 as my salary. However, this is not even enough for accommodation and meals. I am doing it as it is a permanent government job with a pension.
	The issue of change management	They are not assigning us to one branch. Many branches are there, and they assign us (trainees) on a rotation basis. It is easy to learn and get knowledge in new works through this.
	Performance management and alignment	We all have to work, but they will tell us what to do that day only in the morning. Sometimes, they struggle with their work and ask us to help. That time we will help them to do their work.
	Less training and development strategies	They took us as trainees to the job. Then they separated us for training. We trained in 05 chapters and learned about public sector projects and leadership in our training period. They divided us into five groups and trained each group in only one chapter. After that, due to the pandemic situation, they stopped this training method.
	A vast pool of applicants without the right qualifications	There are huge applications received from graduates, even those who had completed their graduation five to ten years before seeking that opportunity, and unwanted applications are filled. Therefore, there aren't enough chairs for us to sit and work.
	Lack of strategic analysis like SWOT & PESTLE clarify the abbreviations	This means it is not in the correct way of the planned process. They divide and assign a job to us as their wish.
	Unstructured recruitment process	They said they would give suitable work on related subjects/fields during the job interview. Furthermore, they checked our qualifications. However, they just divided and posted to the GS division office and other departments.
Challenges on the part of employees	Educational issues of employees	My earlier aim was to be a doctor, but I could not get good results in the A/L Bio stream.
	Privacy issues	Yes! It is also my home issues and the condition of being home.
	Work attitudes	As I said, I desired to learn new things and work as a trainee whenever I went to a new place. Learning new work always is suitable for trainees.

Source: Authors' compilation based on collected data

Compensation and benefits are vital motivational drives of employees. Though the employee is a government or a private officer, it is always good to follow the correct process of compensating the employee. Every HR practitioner should concern about compensation and benefit at first sight of recruitment.

Change management needs an effective change in the organisation based on the qualifications and the company's purpose, and a good vision of changing trainee development officers is always essential. Performance management and alignment are challenges in recruiting employees. Based on the performance of the employees, they can manage the work alignment by properly creating the workflow.

Training and development strategies are critical for the success of the company, but they might also be a challenge. Officers are not getting proper training, especially in government appointments, which challenges the company and the employee. Therefore, giving adequate training is a significant concern.

Unpleasant applicant experiences may result from an unorganised interview process. Prospects frequently have a bad experience when companies are less concerned about the interview process. For instance, adding procedures to the recruiting process at the last minute might aggravate candidates' hopes for a response. The effects of the challenging nature of unstructured interviews can significantly understand through the responses.

A vast pool of applicants and employees might be an issue. The company must always consider that there is a vast pool of applicants, and they should have the right qualifications. Without the right qualifications, the effort of employees is not valuable to the company. In the initial stage of the planning process in HR functions, the company must follow a SWOT or PESTLE analysis to identify the need for employment. Most government officers are not recruited after proper analysis. Other than that, employees may have challenges, as highlighted. For example, privacy issues and work attitudes may also be challenged in recruiting development officers.

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## CONCLUSION

Strategic HR functions include compensation, recruitment, succession, and employee development. Additionally, the use of 'employee transfers' and 'job rotations' may have an impact on employees' loyalty to their employers because they may need to adjust to new work environments and work environments with different types of people. Some current employees may not like the idea of moving between organisations or departments. Hence, choosing suitable candidates who can face difficulties and have the proper attitudes, behaviours, and drive may become indispensable for personnel/HR managers.

This study examined the current incarnation of Sri Lankan governance. Administrative, policy and legislative reforms will not enhance the governance quality without political or administrative commitment, system stability, or institutional improvements. Although Sri Lanka's administrative structure has undergone multiple changes, none have significantly improved governance. Additionally, it gave the democratically elected government a disproportionate amount of political authority and allowed bureaucracy politicisation. Therefore, Sri Lanka provides a case study for evaluating the relationship between the political system, reforms, organisational culture, and the effectiveness of governance. Proper SHRM practices are inadequate, which leads to challenges on the part of development officers.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

According to evidence and discussion, Sri Lanka's political system combines coalition building with paternalism. Traditional, main political parties accept paternalism because of the long-standing impact of political dynasties, kinship, ethnicity, caste, regionalism, and nationalism. A new Sri Lankan administration type was created later due to colonial history, power politics, and social order. The work opportunities that graduate recruiting provides for the unemployed are its most obvious advantage. This study demonstrates how to boost graduate hiring, elevating job happiness; and institutional output. Procedures must be followed before and following the hiring of graduates.

The primary issue with graduate recruiting is the lack of a suitable and organised plan to draw graduates. Multiple recruitment strategies were used in 2012. Political sponsorship was the most typical strategy. According to most respondents, this method is unfit for public duty. The most decisive impact on job satisfaction comes from a mismatch between a person's university education and job. According to the study, nearly half of the recent

graduates are dissatisfied with the employment process. They cautioned against interfering politically in the hiring process. The findings for the public sector suggest creating a thorough job analysis, job description, and task list before recruiting.

Additionally, nearly half of all graduates have a non-academic degree. Internal graduates, therefore, expect preference in government hiring programmes.

The study findings demonstrated that internal hiring techniques, such as the Sri Lankan companies that responded, frequently used the terms 'promotion-from-within,' 'transfers,' and 'job rotations'. The practical upshot is that effective internal recruitment strategies may encourage current Sri Lankan employees to work harder and become more devoted to the company while increasing their job security by providing them with options for lateral or upward career progression (potentially desired HRM outcomes). Effective use of internal personnel resources could also enable management to observe and evaluate the skills accurately, given the accumulated information accumulated throughout the employment connection. According to the research data, 'application forms,' 'knowledge or skill exams,' and 'one-to-one and panel interviews' utilised by Sri Lankan survey companies are the most frequent among the many selection approaches.

In addition, public organisations must develop a coherent set of employment policies to attract and retain qualified staff. However, the particularity of the public sector focusing on public interest outcomes (ill-defined objectives) and the more open accountability (with politicians and taxpayers) may add a complexity level that does not easily fit with HRM as a strategic partner in achieving competitiveness and success (Fahim, 2018). This may be a future research area based on the findings of this paper.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Listening to the information needs of visually impaired users and implications for the libraries

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**Abstract:** The study is pursued with the purpose of understanding the information-seeking behaviour of visually impaired users in Kashmir division of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Union Territory (UT). The main objectives of the study were to know the use of the library and the perception of library among visually impaired users. The data was collected through a schedule and was analysed using quantitative techniques. In total, 63 persons were identified as visually impaired, but only 58 responded to the schedule. In order to fulfil various information needs, the users are enquired about different sources consulted. The users have found many print and electronic sources in the libraries but, at the same time, suggested that there should be a facility for conversion of text from print to electronic format in the library. Furthermore, the users are using the various library services but the availability of few special facilities are not being reported by the users. Although, 74.1% of users are able to work with computers, 70.7% suggested that more awareness programmes should be conducted by the libraries. Since this special group of users is often forgotten, it is important to know what they use and what they need.

**Keywords:** Information literacy, computer literacy, information seeking behaviour, visually impaired library users.

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## INTRODUCTION

Information required by each individual in this world and this has become one of the basic needs of human beings. Information is required for variety of purposes and is compulsory for the socio-economic development of the societies. Similarly, information is also needed by visually impaired persons as well to survive in the world. However, the information required by the visually impaired persons is variable, and it must be available in accessible and usable formats. Although visually impaired persons are a part of our society, we have not been able to provide them with the required information due to various reasons. Many libraries have set up separate sections devoted to visually impaired persons. However, there is much more that needs to be done to meet their specific requirements (Kori & Mulla, 2022).

Visually challenged persons have varying degrees of sight loss eventually leading to the diversity of information needs. So, libraries must consider procuring different kinds of resources in varied formats. After acquiring resources, libraries have to think about searching for relevant information. The libraries, thus, require an ample amount of time to process the various resources so that they become easily accessible to visually impaired library users. Visually impaired users find it difficult to locate materials in libraries without assistance. The library professionals must cater to changing information needs and formats. However, with Information Communication Technology (ICT) and adaptive technology, the retrieval and access to information has greatly enhanced (Appiah, 2017).

### Visual impairment

The term visual impairment is used for persons who have limited range of sight and focus which cannot be easily corrected with spectacles. Persons who require special lighting to be able to see, or have blurred vision, or have

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tunnel vision also come under this category. Some visually impaired persons need assistive devices, while others require specialised spectacles, Braille or Large Print so that they can see.

### **Information needs of blind and visually impaired persons**

Visually impaired persons require material in a variety of formats like large print, audiobooks, e-books, talking books and Braille. The information needs of visually impaired persons vary based on their level of study, age and degree of impairment. Apart from this, the needs are mostly specific to particular situations required over a certain period. Over the years, it has been seen that visually impaired people mostly prefer audiobooks and DAISY books. Libraries must keep track of their information needs and try to procure such kind of resources. Apart from the resources, the libraries have to set up the infrastructure, including computers, scanners, and other gadgets like DAISY players and magnifiers. The libraries also need to either employ trained staff who can serve the visually impaired in an efficient way or train the available staff for the services to be provided to the visually impaired persons.

Although the internet has helped in making the resources accessible, libraries in the global south have a long way to go in addressing their specific needs. There is a need to shift from traditional services and print resources to electronic services and electronic resources. Further, the role of library professionals has also been enhanced with the introduction of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the internet (Bamidele, 2021).

The manner and special way of meeting the information needs have to rely on sources and assistance outside the regular information resources available in the library. Consequently, the information needs of visually impaired students go through a series of additional steps before they are met with and may require technological devices for effective service delivery. They should ensure the appropriate assets, like information resources, space, services and ICT infrastructure, to make information accessible to the visually impaired.

Despite variations in educational backgrounds and living conditions of visually impaired persons, decision-makers, educational administrators, policymakers, school administrators, parents, librarians, and information professionals should work together with a common vision to achieve equal accessibility for the blind and visually impaired people to information, with the use of adaptive technology and formulate policies which will prove helpful in fulfilling the information needs of visually impaired people. Librarians, as information providers, must cater to the special information needs of visually impaired people to keep them abreast of the latest information. Libraries should make efforts to provide inclusive services to all users, including people with disabilities. We need to formulate policies regarding the provision of library services to people with disabilities, providing adequate budgets and staff training. In addition, practical measures are required in each important building in society, like constructing buildings with ramps and maintaining working lifts, acquiring Braille and large print information resources in the libraries, as well as providing assistive equipment (Majinge & Stilwell, 2013).

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## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical studies on various models of information seeking behaviour**

Most studies of how people look for information were built on a framework that was first made by Paisley, and then improved by Allen and others. They wanted the area of communication research to be more unified and consistent. The old way of looking for and using of information was to focus on how to get and handle information. Wilson (1981) developed a model of how people look for information. In this model, people share information with each other. During the search process, if a user finds information that could help someone else, he sends it to that person. The model describes how a person looks for information based on what they think they need. He asks for information from official or unofficial systems, services, or sources to meet this need. His

requests may be met with or not, affecting whether useful information can be found. If he finds what he needs, he uses the knowledge he found. If he doesn't find what he needs, he has to start looking again. Wilson changed his model after study many different fields, such as decision-making, psychology, innovation, health, communication, and consumer research. During the same decade, Wilson (1999) looked at the information search and seeking behaviour model to find out how communication and information behaviour relate to seeking and looking for information in an information retrieval system.

Krikelas (1983) updated the model by incorporating the findings of user studies. He has shown that his plan is based on three important activities: getting information, looking for information, and giving information. During the same time, Ellis (1989); Ellis *et al.* (1993); and Ellis & Hagan (1997) came up with a general model of how people look for information. They did this by looking at how social scientists, researchers, scientists, chemists, and engineers look for information. Ellis's model shows that there are six different ways to look for information: starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, watching, and extracting. Brown (1999) invented a general model of how people look for knowledge. In this model, several aspects of how people look for information are projected onto an organisational and behavioural framework. Likewise, Marchionini (1997) came up with a model of how people look for information that was made specifically for the electronic world. In this model, the process of getting information is broken down into eight steps.

While these models were being framed, the descriptive studies were going on in various disciplines and the models were being applied to different users, like students, scholars, and faculty members. Among various categories, researchers also tried to understand the information-seeking behaviour of visually impaired persons.

### **Studies on information needs of visually impaired users**

Access to information is now a basic need of human beings. Information seeking is a form of human behaviour that involves seeking information by actively examining information sources or information retrieval systems to satisfy the information need or to solve a problem. It is needed for people of all walks of life for socio-economic development, decision-making, and a wide variety of purposes. Information is essential to all human beings, and the aim of libraries is to provide the right information at the right time in the right format to its patrons regardless of race, religion, age, nationality and language. This core function includes the provision of information to people with disabilities. Arowosaye & Bakare (2022) in their study concluded that visually impaired students have the same information needs to meet as any other student. Bagandanshwa (2006) emphasises that all persons have a right to information, regardless of disability. He maintains that information is power because it is the source of knowledge and facts. The World Health Organization (n.d.) declares that around 2.2 billion people are visually impaired worldwide, having a near or distant vision impairment. However, each individual in the society has equal rights, and we cannot deny any particular group any specific human right. Equal right implies that the needs of each individual is of equal importance and that those needs must be the basis for planning. Library and information services must be equally hospitable to the visually impaired and those without this impairment (Davies, 2007). It is crucial for the visually impaired through the use of information. Just like the sighted, information use will ensure that they partake in modern society's processes through the ability to identify, interpret, process, disseminate, use, and reuse information in order to make informed choices and reduce uncertainties (Singh & Moirangthem, 2010).

Students must access to information from a good resource to excel in their educational pursuits. In a study conducted by Katz (2007), it was observed that visually impaired students of university experience varying degrees of sight loss that may necessitate diversity in the level of their information needs and the types of library resources required to cater for them. In managing their workload, students often experience difficulties in accessing information to suit their needs in these libraries. Visually impaired students require specialised materials to help accessing and seeking relevant and useful information (Hill, 2013). This means that extra time is required for information processing and transcription from information sources by visually impaired students. It may



become difficult or impossible for visually impaired students to find materials in the library without specialised assistance. Despite the special needs, researchers have consensus that access to library services by students with disabilities is not yet fully available, especially in countries in the global south. It is imperative that this proactive provision of library services be extended to the students with disabilities taking into consideration their special needs. A study by Smith & Rosenblum (2013) revealed that the students with visual impairments find themselves in a condition that triggers the need to seek and use information. For example, students constantly need information to write assignments, essays, tests and other academic related information. They further stated that visually impaired students needed specialised tools like computers, keyboards, and software to generate required information during the lecture time.

Kumar & Sanaman (2015) conducted a study to analyse the challenges faced by blind/ vision-impaired users during web access to leading academic and special libraries of Delhi, India. The result clearly stated that there are barriers faced by visually impaired users in the libraries of Delhi during their web access. Therefore, Kumar & Sanaman (2015) recommended three types of web-based resources that the libraries can offer to their users. These include access to the Internet, access to subscription databases and a library's web pages/website which need to be accessible to people with disabilities. Abdelrahman (2016) studied the availability of library and information services and support to visually-impaired and blind students at the University of Khartoum in Sudan. The study pointed out the specific challenges these students faced in meeting their information needs. Appiah (2017) reported that the neglect to meet the information needs of visually impaired students has negative consequences in improving their academic performance as well as the future development and benefit of society. The study was carried out among visually impaired students from the University of Ghana, Legon and the University of Education, Winneba. The results reveal that the students used formal and informal methods to seek information. The study also noted that information presented in the printed formats has been a hurdle for students. However, the study disclosed that assistive technologies have helped them in overcoming many problems. Fatima & Kumari (2017) revealed the information-seeking behaviour of visually impaired students in Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), that most of the users seek information for their career development. The highest percentage of the users utilize audiobooks as an information source and find them fairly accessible but face difficulties also because of the lack of computers with screen reader software. More than half of the users are satisfied with the overall functioning of the library. A collaborative study by Aghauche & Udem (2018) investigated the utilisation of library and information resources by visually impaired primary school children in special education centres in southeast Nigeria. In a study of the convenience and accessibility of library services to students with disabilities, Phukubje & Ngoepe (2017) identified five library services offered to students with disabilities, which include computer training facilities, orientation and mobility, Braille production, low vision reading facilities, Braille and audio library services in order to meet their information needs. The paper by Alabi & Mutula (2020) aims to determine the state-of-the-art report of assistive technologies developed for people living with visual disabilities and those used in academic libraries around the world. However, computers, Assistive Technology (AT) and the web are developed to overcome the lack of access to non-print information and add value for persons who are visually impaired. Likewise, Ndlovu (2021) collected data through interviews with students with disabilities and Disability Rights Centre staff members. The paper aimed to explore the effectiveness of AT and assistive devices. The study revealed inadequate provision and a specific AT and assistive devices were inaccessible to visually impaired persons, thereby limiting learning.

Mutanga (2017) reviewed literature focused on students with disabilities in South Africa, while Hill (2017) carried out a content analysis of the library and information science literature on the same theme but focused on literature published from 2000-2010 around the world.

Arowosaye & Bakare (2022) conducted a study of the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, through a questionnaire. The study revealed that visually impaired students use audio newspapers and magazines, e-books, audiobooks and internet resources as well. A study by Kori & Mulla (2022) found that visually impaired students of Maheshwari School of Blind, Karnataka, India to be using library resources and services satisfactorily. All the

students faced difficulties while seeking information but informed that they often consulted library staff, friends, and teachers for required information. The majority of the students were found to be using audio-visual materials and assistive technologies. A survey was conducted by Adetoro (2015) to investigate the use of alternative formats and perceptions of information services to the visually impaired in Nigeria. The author reported that 112 out of 180, provided information related to the study. It also reported that Braille materials were being used to a greater extent by visually impaired persons. The researcher opines that much need to be done towards alternative formats and e-resources. Seyama *et al.* (2014) investigated whether the services provided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal on its Pietermaritzburg Campus were able to fulfil the information needs of blind students and those with visual impairments. According to this study, the information needs of blind students and those with visual impairments were not readily met because of the barriers to information-seeking processes. Among the barriers listed were computers in the library without suitable software, such as JAWS and ZoomText. Using survey methodology, Aghauche & Udem (2018) questioned 129 respondents, consisting of 125 visually impaired students and four librarians in South-East Nigeria. This study showed that visually impaired primary school students were making use of available resources to a limited extent due to the non-availability of resources in alternative formats.

### Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine the use of library resources and services by visually impaired students in Kashmir.
2. To understand the information needs of visually impaired students.
3. To gauge the availability of special facilities for visually impaired users in Kashmir.
4. To understand some information literacy skills of visually impaired users.
5. To propose the areas of improvement in libraries serving visually impaired users.

### Scope

The study was confined to Kashmir Division of Jammu & Kashmir UT. A total of 63 visually impaired users were identified, but only 58 responded to the schedule making the response rate equal to 92.06%.

**Table 1:** Responses received

Male		Female	
No. of Respondents Contacted	Positive Response	No. of Respondents Contacted	Positive Response
48	46	15	12

## METHODOLOGY

The survey method was used to achieve the objectives of the research. The research used purposive sampling keeping in view the low population of visually impaired users in hand. The visually impaired users were identified during a the National Seminar on Print Disabilities organised by the University of Kashmir, Srinagar. The majority of the responses were received from the visually impaired users who participated in the programme, while other responses were collected from Help Foundation, Inderhama, Srinagar. The first response providers proved helpful in identifying the other visually impaired users in the Kashmir Valley. After identifying the visually impaired users, the investigators interacted with them and tried to get the schedules filled with much caution since these specially-abled users need much of our attention. The response rate can be broken as detailed below:

**Table 2:** Category of visually impaired users

	Male		Female	
	Totally Blind	Low Vision	Totally Blind	Low Vision
	34	12	5	7

Although the questionnaire would have served the purpose of the research, keeping in mind the difficulties of the visually impaired users in reading the printed text, schedules were framed. Initially, a few schedules were distributed among known visually impaired users as a pilot study so as to make necessary corrections in the schedule framed for getting the information from these users. The decision of selecting schedules as data collection tool proved right and neither the investigator nor the visually impaired users faced any difficulty in filling the schedules. The responses were collected from June to December 2022. The data collected was organised in MS Excel for analysis, and basic statistical techniques were applied to achieve the objective laid down for the study.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Gender

The study reveals that the majority of visually impaired users who responded to the schedule included males (79.31%) as against 20.69% female respondents. Similar results are found in the study of Adetoro (2015); Appiah (2017); Kori & Mulla (2022), who found that the majority of the respondents are male compared to female, while the results of Arowosaye & Bakare (2022) indicate opposite trend with the majority of users being female (54.3%) compared to males (45.7%).

**Table 3:** Distribution of the sample by gender

S. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	46	79.31
2	Female	12	20.69
	TOTAL	58	100.00

### Age group

The study found that the majority (77.6%) of the visually impaired library users were of the age group 20-30 years followed by 31-40 years, similar to the findings of Adetoro (2015) wherein the majority of the visually impaired users (75.5%) were found to be between 21 and 39. However, as per the study of Arowosaye & Bakare (2022), the majority of the respondents (48.6%) were in the age group of 15-25.

**Table 4:** Distribution of the sample by age group

S. No.	Age group	Frequency	Percentage
1	Below 20 years	0	0
2	20-30	45	77.59
3	31-40	13	22.41
4	41-50	0	0
5	51-60	0	0
	TOTAL	58	100.00

### Designation/ Status

Although different user group was considered for the research, the study revealed that the majority (56.9%) of the visually impaired users were students, while a some (6.9%) were working in different organisations, and another category were scholars (6.9%). However, a good number of them also included job seekers (29.3%).

**Table 5:** Classification of the sample by category

S. No.	Status	Frequency	Percentage
1	Scholars	4	6.90
2	Students	33	56.89
3	Working	4	6.90
4	Job Seeker	17	29.31
	TOTAL	58	100.00

### Qualification

The users who responded positively were in the majority (39.7%) possessing post-graduation as their qualification, followed by undergraduates (29.3%) and graduates (25.9%).

**Table 6:** Distribution of the sample by educational qualification

S. No.	Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
1	Graduate	15	25.86
2	PG	23	39.66
3	PhD/MPhil	3	5.17
4	Undergraduate	17	29.31
	TOTAL	58	100.00

### Visit to library

The visually impaired users who responded to the schedule were asked about frequency of visits to the library which revealed a gloomy picture as most of them were not using the library on a daily basis, but most were using it on a weekly basis (34.5%) while others visited library only when required (8.6%) or fortnightly (8.6%). Around 17.2% of users visited the library two or three times a week, while only 15.5% of users went to the library on a daily basis. In contrast, the results of Kori & Mulla (2022) reveal that all the users (100%) seek the information on a daily basis.

**Table 7:** Distribution of the sample by frequency of visit to library

S. No.	Visit to library	Frequency	Percentage
1	Daily	9	15.52
2	Two/ Three times in a week	10	17.24
3	Weekly	20	34.48
4	Fortnightly	5	8.62
5	Monthly	9	15.52
6	Use only when needed	5	8.62
	TOTAL	58	100.00

### Sources consulted

When the visually impaired users were asked about sources consulted by them, most of them (87.9%) answered that they ask their colleagues, followed by their teachers (81.03%). However, there is also widespread consultation of textbooks (70.7%), and use of the internet (65.5%). Few are consulting professionals (32.8%), while radio

(25.9%) and TV (36.2%) are also used as sources of information. It was good to see that visually impaired users discuss things, and the same has become the source of information for 20.7% of users. However, the results of Kori & Mulla (2022) study reveal that all the users consult library staff (100%), discuss with friends (100%), and discuss with teachers (100%) in order to access the information. Likewise, the study conducted by Appiah (2017) reveals that 55.8% relied on colleagues for their information, 38.2% browsed the Internet, 36.7% of the respondents indicated radio as their source of acquiring information, and 14.7% consulted textbooks to acquire information.

**Table 8:** Type of sources often consulted

S. No.	Source	Frequency	Percentage
1	Textbooks	41	70.69
2	Radio	15	25.86
3	TV	21	36.21
4	Group discussion	12	20.69
5	Colleagues	51	87.93
6	Professionals	19	32.76
7	Teachers	47	81.03
8	Handouts/ Catalogues	5	8.62
9	Internet	38	65.52

## Need

While ascertaining the information needs of visually impaired users, it was revealed that most of the users have academic information needs (94.8%) followed by employment information needs (84.5%). However, a good number of users (60.3%) have health information needs while global information needs (39.7%) and sports information needs (19%) also are part of the information needs of visually impaired users. Similarly, study conducted by Appiah (2017) reveal that 68 (100%) visually impaired students from the University of Education, Winneba and University of Ghana, Legon required academic information issues, 45.5% required employment information, and 42.6% required health information. Likewise, the information needs of the respondents of the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, ranged from personal development, to educational and financial matters as per the study of Arowosaye & Bakare (2022).

**Table 9:** Distribution of the sample by need of users

S. No.	Need	Frequency	Percentage
1	Academic Information Need	55	94.83
2	Health Information Need	35	60.34
3	Employment Information Need	49	84.48
4	Sports Information Need	11	18.97
5	Global Information Need	23	39.66

## Purpose of visiting the library

Disclosing the information about the purpose of visiting the library, most of the users reported that they visit the library to update their knowledge (93.1%), followed by preparation for different competitive examinations (72.4%). Understanding the topics taught in the classroom is also noted by a significant number of users (65.5%). However, users (44.8%) were going to the library to use assistive technology as well. Few users went to the library in preparation for job interviews (12.1%), while others were writing their research papers/ thesis (8.6%), and only

5.2% were preparing to teach in their classes. On the other hand, Kori & Mulla (2022) found that all the users visited the library to use assistive technology (100%), read educational resources (100%), and prepare for examinations (100%). However, a study conducted by Appiah (2017) reveal that most visually impaired students (58.8%) seek resources for learning, followed by 36.7% and 35.2% of students to prepare for examinations and keep up with new knowledge, respectively.

**Table 10:** Purpose

S. No.	Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
1	To update knowledge	54	93.10
2	To Prepare for competitive examinations	42	72.41
3	To Prepare for job interviews	7	12.07
4	To write research papers/ thesis	5	8.62
5	To Plan and prepare for class where I teach	3	5.17
6	To understand the topics taught in the class where I study	38	65.52
7	To use assistive technology	26	44.83

### Print sources consulted

Enquiring about the print resources consulted by the visually impaired users, they all consulted the books. The same is good for the libraries since all the content is not available in electronic format. However, they are using the books through different means like scanning with mobile phones/ scanners with the help of numerous applications, or asking others to read them the books. Dictionaries are also being used (15.5%), apart from encyclopaedias (6.9%). However, journals, dissertations, project reports and magazines were also used, each by 8.6% users. Only a meagre number of users consulted technical reports (3.5%) and newspapers (3.5%).

**Table 11:** Print sources consulted

S. No.	Print sources	Frequency	Percentage
1	Books	58	100
2	Journals	5	8.62
3	Bound Volumes of Periodicals	0	0
4	Dissertations/ Theses	5	8.62
5	Project Reports	5	8.62
6	Technical Reports	2	3.45
7	Magazines	5	8.62
8	Encyclopaedias	4	6.90
9	Dictionaries	9	15.52
10	Newspapers	2	3.45

### Electronic resources used

With the advent of information technology, each source of information is finding a way to be available in other formats like electronic, audio and DAISY formats. The study discovered that audiobooks are mainly used (94.8%) by visually impaired persons, followed by DAISY books (56.9%) and e-books (46.6%). However, digitised books and online newspapers are also consulted by 36.2% and 17.2% of respondents, respectively. E-journals are being used by 8.6% of respondents, while e-databases and e-repositories are not being used by anyone, probably due to poor awareness among the users like in the study of Kori & Mulla (2022), indicating that the users are not having access to online databases. Regarding the use of audio resources, and e-books, Arowosaye & Bakare (2022) disclose that the audio resources and e-books were being used by the visually impaired persons in the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.

**Table 12:** Electronic resources used

S. No.	Electronic resources	Frequency	Percentage
1	Audio books	55	94.83
2	DAISY books	33	56.90
3	E-Books	27	46.55
4	E-Databases	0	0
5	E-Journals	5	8.62
6	E-Repositories	0	0
7	Digitised books	21	36.21
8	Online newspapers	10	17.24

### Use of library services

Among the different services offered by the libraries, most of the users avail of book lending service (67.2%). The users are availing reference service (50%), OPAC (51.7%), internet facility (51.7%) and reprographic services (37.9%) as well. The visually impaired users are attending/ participating in the extension services, including seminars (44.8%), workshops (34.5%) and user awareness programmes (60.3%) conducted by the libraries, respectively. However, access to e-resources (25.9%) and remote access facility (17.2%) is yet to make an impact on visually impaired users. Current Awareness Service (CAS) (8.6%) and book bank facility (5.2%) are hardly used by visually impaired users, while as the services like inter-library loans and newspaper clipping service are not used at all, probably due to unawareness or non-availability of the service in the library. However, Kori & Mulla (2022) noted that while e-books are not provided to them in their library, audio-visual materials are provided.

**Table 13:** Library services used

S. No.	Library services	Frequency	Percentage
1	Reference Service	29	50.00
2	Book Lending Service	39	67.24
3	Reprographic Services	22	37.93
4	Current Awareness Service (CAS)	5	8.62
5	OPAC/ Web OPAC	30	51.72
6	Inter Library Loan	0	0.00
7	Internet facility	30	51.72
8	Access to E-Resources	15	25.86
9	Remote Access Facility	10	17.24
10	Book Bank Facility	3	5.17
11	Newspaper Clipping Service	0	0
12	Extension service of participating in conferences, seminars <i>etc</i>	26	44.83
13	Extension service of participating in workshops, training programmes <i>etc</i>	20	34.48
14	Extension service of participating in user awareness programmes, lectures <i>etc</i>	35	60.34

### Availability of special facilities

When the users were asked about the ease of access to the library, most (77.6%) replied that the library is easily accessible. Lift facility (27.6%), and (29.3%) are also available in libraries, respectively. Searchable e-books (44.8%), searchable e-databases (36.2%), searchable e-journals (39.7%) and searchable digitised books (25.9%) are available in the libraries. Some have carved separate sections for visually impaired users (34.5%), while a Braille collection (25.9%) is also housed in some libraries. Job Access With Speech (JAWS)/ NVDA software (37.9%), Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scanners (34.5%), Kurzweil software (34.5%), Audiobooks / recordings (56.9%) and large print keyboards (32.8%) are also available while as 17.2% reported that libraries are lending Daisy Players and 34.5% reported that libraries have set up separate browsing centre for the visually impaired users. Daisy book compilation and lending of laptops/ iPads are not reported to have been initiated by any library, probably due to a lack of funding and trained manpower in libraries. Likewise, Kori & Mulla (2022)

found that 79.6% of users find it easy to access information and all the respondents stated that assistive technology is available in their library. In addition, the visually impaired students of Maheshwari School of Blind also revealed that they don't have elevators but informed that the building is friendly to specially-abled users. Similarly, the study of Arowosaye & Bakare (2022) reveals that internet resources were being used by visually impaired users.

**Table 14:** Distinctive facilities of library used by the respondents

S. No.	Special facilities for visually impaired	Frequency	Percentage
1	Easy access to library building including ramp	45	77.59
2	Lift facility	16	27.59
3	Wheelchairs	17	29.31
4	Separate section for visually impaired students	20	34.48
5	Braille collection	15	25.86
6	Job Access With Speech (JAWS)/ NVDA software	22	37.93
7	OCR scanners	20	34.48
8	Kurzweil software	20	34.48
9	Audio Books/ recordings	33	56.90
10	Large Print Keyboards	19	32.76
11	Daisy Books compilation	0	0
12	Searchable E-books	26	44.83
13	Searchable E-databases	21	36.21
14	Searchable E-journals	23	39.66
15	Searchable Digitized books	15	25.86
16	Lending of Daisy Players	10	17.24
17	Lending of Laptops/ iPads	0	0
18	Separate Browsing Centre for visually impaired students	20	34.48

### Library orientation programmes attended

When the visually impaired users were asked about their participation in the library orientation programmes, 72.4% reported that they have attended the same, while 27.6% informed that they have not attended the programmes yet.

**Table 15:** Attendance in library orientation programme

S. No.	Library Orientation Programme	Frequency	Percentage
1	Attended	42	72.41
2	Not attended	16	27.59

### Requirement of library orientation programmes in future

When the visually impaired users were asked whether they require the library orientation programme, all of them answered in conformity, indicating the importance of the library orientation programmes for this category of library users.

**Table 16:** Requirement of library orientation

S. No.	Requirement of library orientation in future	Frequency	Percentage
1	Require	58	100
2	Does not require	0	0



### Computer literacy

Regarding computer literacy, it was revealed that a good percentage 74.1% of visually impaired users have knowledge regarding computers, while a few are yet to gain knowledge related to computers.

**Table 17:** Computer literacy

S. No.	Computer literacy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	43	74.14
2	No	15	25.86

### Place for accessing internet

When visually impaired users were asked about the place for accessing the internet, most of them (84.5%) informed that they access the internet from home, 51.7% access the internet from the library and only 15.5% access the same from their workplaces.

**Table 18:** Access to Internet

S. No.	Place for accessing internet	Frequency	Percentage
1	Library	30	51.72
2	Home	49	84.48
3	Workplace	9	15.52

### Rating different parameters

The visually impaired students strongly agreed to the statement that they prefer electronic resources to print resources, as in the result of the study conducted by Appiah (2017) disclosing that the majority of the students (85.2%) preferred the electronic format for information instead of print (7.3%). The average results of the statement about whether library services are adequate, revealed that they agree to it. The findings contrast the study conducted on the users of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, which indicate that they were not satisfied with the services being provided to them (Arowosaye & Bakare, 2022).

Regarding whether library building/ infrastructure is well structured for visually impaired users, the overall rating reveals that they are satisfied with the infrastructure. Regarding the professional competence of the library staff, the users reported (average=3.78) that the staff is competent enough in handling the visually impaired users. The users also reported that the attitude of library staff is helpful towards visually impaired users.

The visually impaired users agreed to the statements that the training/ awareness programmes conducted by the library are useful for them and the library provided more accurate and authentic information than the internet. However, to the statement that they verify the information on the internet to determine its accuracy, the overall rating came out to be neutral.

**Table 19:** Rating different parameters

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Average	Overall rating
Prefer electronic resources to print resources	49	8	1			4.83	Strongly Agree
Library services are adequate for persons with visual impairment	7	42	4	5		3.88	Agree
Library building/ infrastructure is well structured for visually impaired users	4	42	7	5		3.78	Agree
Professional competence of library staff is good enough to handle visually impaired users	10	31	12	4	1	3.78	Agree
Attitude of library staff is helpful towards visually impaired users	15	32	8	2	1	4.00	Agree
Training/ Awareness programme conducted by library are useful for visually impaired users	25	17	11	3	2	4.03	Agree
Verify the information on internet to determine its accuracy	5	4	29	13	7	2.78	Neutral
Library provided accurate and authentic information than internet	15	22	20	1		3.88	Agree

### Suggestions by the respondents

The visually impaired library users gave a few suggestions as well. Among them, many respondents (70.7%) were in favour of conducting awareness programmes more frequently so that usage of resources can be enhanced. Around 37.9% of users also suggested that library staff should be trained to handle visually impaired persons. However, most of them (25.9%) suggested that the facility for conversion of text to electronic format should be there in the library since most of the resources are in the print format, while 20.7% suggested to constructing separate cells for visually impaired users in the libraries.

**Table 20:** Respondents' suggestions for improvement

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
There should be separate cell for visually impaired users to cater to their need	12	20.69
There should be facility of conversion of text to electronic form in the library since most of the resources are in print format	49	84.48
Library staff should be trained to handle visually impaired users	22	37.93
Awareness programmes should be conducted frequently to enhance usage	41	70.69

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After consulting many visually impaired students, the following recommendations can be made:

### 1. Library policy

Institutions admitting special needs students should make efforts to frame a library policy favourable to visually impaired students. Such a policy should address issues regarding access to information, budgetary allocation, collection development and other privileges for visually impaired students. The recommendation is made due to the fact that around 84.5% of visually impaired library users suggested that there should be a conversion of text to electronic form in the library since most of the resources are in print format. These things cannot happen without a concrete policy since haphazard and uncoordinated efforts prevail in the absence of such policy.

## **2. Procuring assistive technology devices**

Assistive technology devices play an important role in information technology and its use by visually impaired users. The library must procure computers with screen readers, magnifiers, scanners and other similar devices so as to assist the users. After procurement, library staff should be trained to operate them and be able to assist visually impaired users. The majority of the users under study prefer electronic resources instead of print resources, which demand procurement of assistive devices so that necessary conversion can be made in-house in the libraries.

## **3. Access to library**

All the buildings on the campus should be made in such a way that wheel chair use and disable access are facilitated, including the library. All the drains should be covered, and all buildings should have ramps instead of stairs. This will help the students in reaching their destinations without any problem. Apart from this, the library should provide elevators/ lifts, automatic sensor doors and self-check-in and check-out of book facilities through RFID technology. This recommendation is based on the statement that “Library building/ infrastructure is well structured for visually impaired users” wherein the average of the response received was around 3.78, indicating that still much need to be done in this area so as to ensure that the resources can be accessed easily.

## **4. Improvement in access by way of conversion**

Since most of the literature in libraries is in printed form, efforts should be made to convert printed texts into electronic formats. This requires special attention since we have ensured that each and every word in the printed form is correctly converted in the electronic format. For this, the files are saved in .pdf format or other easily readable formats. Likewise, DAISY books are formed which read text from the first page to the last. Apart from this, audiobooks are also preferred by visually impaired users. So, efforts need to be made to compile e-books, audiobooks, DAISY books as soon as any book is required by any visually impaired student since these are being preferred over printed books as per the findings of current study and previous studies.

## **5. Inter-library cooperation**

Since the cost of providing equipment and resources for visually impaired students is very high, it is recommended that universities/ institutions which enrol specially-abled students need to establish collaboration and cooperation with organisations that provide services to these students. In this manner, some resources can be shared and used through inter-library cooperation by all the students, preventing duplication of investment of resources for digitisation *etc.*

## **6. Library orientation/ induction programmes**

The library should conduct library orientation/induction programmes to create more awareness about the various types of special library services offered to the visually impaired users so that they don't feel like aliens in the presence of other students. Around 70.7% of visually impaired users suggested that awareness programmes should be conducted frequently to enhance usage.

## **7. Appointing skilled staff and training**

Skilled staff should be engaged so that they can assist visually impaired students. In case, the existing library staff members are unfamiliar with the services to visually impaired students, they should be sent for training programs and skill-enhancing workshops for upgrading their skills as 37.9% visually impaired users suggested that library staff should be trained to handle visually impaired users.

## 8. Partnership with NGOs and publishers

Although the partnership of libraries with NGOs and publishers is not seen in society, this component is extremely important so that prescribed study materials are made available in accessible versions for specially abled. In case, this happens, the students with special abilities will never face any difficulty in accessing the required information.

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## CONCLUSION

The study analysed the information-seeking behaviour of visually impaired students. The study reveals that most of them were not using the library on a daily basis, and most of them are asking their colleagues, followed by their teachers for information, indicating that most of them are dependent on others. In the modern era of information technology, when we claim to have much of the information at our fingertips, the information need of visually impaired users is not being fulfilled. Although most of the respondents were using books, it was disappointing to see that journals, dissertations, project reports and magazines were referred by only 8.6% of the respondents. Further, only a meagre number of respondents were using technical reports (3.5%) and newspapers (3.5%). The study reveals that audiobooks are mainly used (94.8%) by visually impaired users, followed by Daisy books (56.9%) and e-books (46.6%) as well. However, further research is required to ascertain the various resources available in different libraries. About 70.7% of respondents were in favour of conducting awareness programmes more frequently so that usage of resources can be enhanced, indicating that much needs to be done from the side of libraries. Interlibrary loans and newspaper clipping services are not used at all, probably due to unawareness or non-availability of the service in the library. The visually impaired students prefer electronic resources to print resources, but many electronic resources are not available to them and the use of available sources may also be rather restricted. Although most respondents were satisfied with the library building, lift facility and wheelchairs, the libraries must enhance their services so that visually impaired users can access the resources without any hindrance. Hence, we come to the conclusion that the information needs of visually impaired users are being fulfilled to some extent, but there are many hindrances as well. Libraries must provide innovative services to these specially-abled students so that they can prosper in society without suffering further.

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