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EDITORIAL

Collective Mission of National University Academics to Protect Fundamental Freedoms in Universities

As those who produce the highest level academic and professional expertise in a land where the large mass of people struggle to make sense of their very existence, are we as academics sensitive enough to our social and political missions with the high scholarly training we claim to possess? This is a fundamental question we should answer with a clear conscience.

The current sense of national insecurity and unrest in the developing world, worsened by the globally destructive Covid 19 Pandemic, has also contributed towards irresponsible governance lacking in transparency. There is a growing perception that there is hardly anyone within these regimes mandated by the people even respond to respond to urgent public grievances, while problems multiply. These are problems that Universities have a fundamental right as well as an obligation to urgently address independently, and if possible, help people to mediate with regard to what burdens them, and also challenge flawed decision making by authorities since expert knowledge comes from university led specialists. Such knowledge should be used to provide checks and balances for the betterment of mankind and most specially in one's own motherland.

Freedom for Critical Scrutiny: Challenging the Status Quo

At a time like this, we in Social Sciences find the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's work, Development as Freedom', to be of timeless significance, with space for freedom increasingly shrinking. Contextually, Sen mentions five distinct freedoms: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Sen articulates that a key determinant of individual capacity to prove one's worth is freedom and social effectiveness.

The people should not only be able to enjoy freedom in a functional sense, but also should be able to maximize its potential if they are to be partners in a dynamic process of social, economic, political and cultural transformation. Once again, the soul-searching question is whether we are receptive to the

national level obligation to correct the courses of action that some individually, and some others collectively pursue with, in the name of national development.

Doing Justice to Oneself as a Catalyst

Revisiting Sen's work, Denis O'Hearn[1], Professor of Sociology at Binghamton University in New York, argues that the ability of individuals to help themselves is fundamental, if they are to maximize their potential. He sees institutions as having a limited role to play unless individuals take themselves seriously in working proactively through them. He states, that 'there is no substitute for individual responsibility' (Sen, 1999). We consider this vital for the development of the academia. It is when this responsibility is taken with sufficient seriousness of purpose that you become a Catalyst: a Change Agent, to ensure that you engage yourself in processes of attitudinal transformation, taking people from their known situation of poverty to an unknown but higher level of social, economic, political and cultural prosperity, respecting the dignity of all.

Countering the Instruments of Suppression

The national universities like ours which are maintained by the taxpayers, of whom the majority are poor, should essentially be centers of dynamic propagation of progressive ideas for the betterment of democracy that sets the people free, as without it we render the very institution of university, invalid, irrelevant and useless. Our national level obligations to protect fundamental freedoms both within and outside the university, locally and globally, should never be underestimated, if we are not to be underestimated in return by the people.

This is especially 'significant at a time when our own university youth face multiple crises together with their teachers with regard to their academic life and professional survival. University student leaders are today imprisoned without proper trial as happened to the leader of the Inter- University Students Federation (IUSF), Wasantha Mudalige. He was remanded for three months for democratically challenging the proposed legislation to militarize civilian

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[1] O'Hearn, D (2009) 'Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom: Ten Years Later', Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, Vol. 8, Spring, pp. 9-15.

university education in August 2021. With him several other university student leaders were also remanded for three months.

Challenging Forms of Injustice within the Education Sector

Additionally, for most of us, a matter of grave concern is increasing inequity and inequality within the entire education system from primary to tertiary levels. Are we mindful and alert that the legitimate provisions for national universities with regard to salaries of permanent staff are withheld arbitrarily for months as happened at the Open University of Sri Lanka. It is proved that the governments are more interested in demonizing student activists as well as teachers who fight back, as unwanted elements within the status quo, as they feel insecure by their arguments in the public domain.

It is in this context we see the current trends of militarization of civilian education through the KDU Bill, and the recently evolved Media Policy Document (2021) of the government as reactionary institutional schemes that are hostile to university independence and autonomy. In line with the provisions laid down in these policy documents relating to use of media, the academics and students need to be sanctioned by university authorities in expressing views through the mass media, thus undermining their independence in creating enlightened public opinion.

As stated in the article, "Academic freedom and institutional autonomy: Developments in Europe and beyond[2]:

> "Recent months have seen important events regarding academic freedom, both in Europe and globally. There have been violations of democratic and human rights in Belarus, including threats against students and staff of universities – which were widely condemned. Last month, the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) ruled that the Hungarian government violated EU law when it amended its education law in 2017. The EJC ruling drew welcome attention to growing violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, which are essential for successful universities and vibrant democratic societies in Europe and beyond".

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[2] European University Association (UUA): November 17th 2017

As we faithfully move into the New Year - 2022, it is our fervent expectation that the national universities will not be Ivory Towers that become irrelevant to the people, but dynamic institutions that will be in the frontline of action in creating   a more progressive and productive society that respects fundamental freedoms and obligations of all mankind.

Dr. Mahim Mendis
Editor in Chief- Vistas Journal

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND RAGGING IN SRI LANKAN STATE UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE 1975 V. W. KULARATNE REPORT

S. A. Prabha. M. Manuratne[1]

ABSTRACT

Ragging has historically been a crucial obstacle to internal democracy in Sri Lankan universities. This paper examines the practice of ragging prevalent in Sri Lankan state universities from the framework of structural violence.

Although there are several studies and reports published on ragging, many of these adopt what Bandy X. Lee has called an "actor-oriented perspective" that attempts to understand violence from the framework of the perpetrator.

In this paper, I examine the structural dimension of ragging by shifting the focus to institutional, social and political factors that enable ragging. The research question informing this study is how far ragging can be considered a form of structural violence shaped by social forms of domination that cannot be traced to single individuals or perpetrators.

I take the V. W. Kularatne Commission Report of 1975 as a case study to examine how it represents the structural dimensions of ragging. The report documents a ragging incident where a group of mathematics teachers who had arrived at the university to follow a diploma course had been ragged.

The report is revealing because it focuses on a specific incident and records quite extensively the role that lecturers, administrators and students played in it.

Drawing on Galtung's idea of structural violence and subsequent developments of this concept, I argue that the report reflects several ways in which we can begin to theorize ragging as structural violence. I use two dimensions of structural violence identified by Galtung: the structural dimension of violence and violence embedded in institutions.

Institutional hierarchies and notions of seniority, links to external political parties and implicit institutional sanctioning of ragging are discussed as part of structural violence. Ideas of class tied to a sense of entitlement within a meritocracy, hegemonic and heterosexist gender norms regarding both masculinity and

femininity are discussed under the dimension of violence embedded in institutions.

This paper argues that the report allows us to trace the structural nature of ragging which leads to an insidious form of structural domination that harms the entire university community's democratic ethos and critical intellectual engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

On February 3rd, 1975, a batch of mathematics teachers arrived at the Vidyalankara Campus of the University of Sri Lanka to follow a Diploma Course in Mathematics. When the teachers arrived, they were in for a rude shock.

Senior students at the university subjected them to ragging, notwithstanding the presence of media personnel (who had been invited to cover the opening ceremony). Lankadeepa, Observer, and Daily Mirror duly reported the incident in the newspapers (Kularatne, 1975, Appendix VIII, IX, X). The president appointed V. W. Kularatne to investigate the incident.

The Commission Report recorded, in harrowing detail, the kind of ragging that existed at the Vidyalankara Campus. Although ragging did not originate in Sri Lanka or the South Asian region (Finkel, 2002, pp. 228-229; Garg, 2009, p. 264; Gunatilaka, 2019, pp. 92; Syratt, 2009, pp.18-24), its impact on the institutional culture of universities in the region is deep and long-standing (Shinde, 2017, p. 664).

Yet, surprisingly, most contemporary studies on ragging tend to approach the problem from the framework of the perpetrators and seldom comment on how structural violence and institutional practices affect ragging.[1] To address this lacuna, this short paper aims to examine the structural nature of ragging by taking the V.W. Kularatne Commission Report of 1975 as a case study. The objective of this study is to examine how far we can attribute characteristics of structural violence to ragging.

More specifically, I ask, to what extent ragging can be seen as a practice that derives its power from existing social and institutional structures and how structural forms of domination shape the practice of ragging. This structural form of violence remains an inner, insidious impediment to constructing a truly democratic ethos within universities. This study draws on Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence in which he distinguishes structural violence from personal violence. In this study, I argue that while there is an obvious dimension of personal violence to ragging, we can map certain forms of structural violence that perpetuate ragging within universities.

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[1] For example, see UGC (2020, pp. 28-31); A representation of several key voices in the debate can be found at Wickramasinghe (2017); Gamage (2020).

Numerous attempts to curb ragging, including legislature, have failed to put an end to the practice. Because ragging is often considered from an actor-oriented perspective, the structural nature of that violence is glossed over. The responsibility of legal action is often transferred to the very institutional structures that enable ragging or have been incapable of preventing ragging in the first place rendering such legislature ineffective.

As Hon. Neelan Tiruchelvam once asked perceptively when the Anti-Ragging Act was presented to parliament, "who is going to enforce this law?" (Parliament, 1998, 1337). The emphasis on punitive measures shifts the focus entirely to the few perpetrators who are caught in the act. Identifying the structural nature of ragging and recognizing institutional responsibility for ragging would facilitate a more holistic approach that can be both preventive and punitive, rather than focus exclusively on the punitive.

Because ragging is considered a "menace" or a "harassment" rather than a deep, structural form of violence, contemporary research tends to focus on the immediate perpetrators or those who support them.[2]

While there is no argument that punitive measures against perpetrators are necessary and can be a deterrent to other potential raggers, ultimately it cannot address the institutional arrangements or social structures that form the basis of ragging.

In this study I examine two aspects of the structural dimension of ragging and the way ragging is embedded within forms of social structures of domination.

The three forms through which I map the structural dimensions of ragging are institutional hierarchies (based on seniority), non-university political links that support ragging and implicit forms of institutional sanctioning for ragging.

I examine three forms of social structures of domination that can be mapped on to ragging and the specific way in which they appeared in this instance: class (or perceptions of class differences),

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[2] For example, see the Webinar titled "Eradicating 'ragging' and violence from universities & higher education institutes" organized by Coalition against violence & harassment in universities in partnership with Advocata Institute and Hype Sri Lanka 15th June 2020.

meritocratic entitlement, and heterosexist and hegemonic gender norms with regard to both masculinity and femininity.

I. BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The university system in Sri Lanka began with the establishment of the University College of Ceylon in 1921, which offered external degrees from the University of London.

In 1942, the University of Ceylon was established with Sir Ivor Jennings as its first Vice-Chancellor.[3] In 1958 two additional universities were established by converting two existing Pirivenas--the Vidyalankara Pirivena and the Vidyodaya Pirivena--into fully-fledged universities.[4]

That year also marked the entry of students who had studied in vernacular languages into the university system. 1971 saw a violent uprising of youths in the South led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

Universities were one major location from which the uprising had drawn recruits and strength.

In 1972, all the universities in the country existing at the time were affiliated to the University of Sri Lanka under one Vice-Chancellor: Peradeniya, Colombo, Vidyodaya, and Vidyalankara were managed under the administration of a President (de Silva, 1977, p.210).

Two additional campuses were created in Katubedda and Jaffna. Wimala de Silva summarizes the general problems faced by the university community at the time in a presentation published in 1977: "the inflexibility of the university organization and the lack of proper planning" (de Silva, 1977, p.215) are at the forefront of the causes of hardships experienced by students and staff.

She particularly points to the weaknesses of the University Act I of 1972 as one major cause of the general disarray and indiscipline in universities (a fact corroborated by the V.W. Kularatne Report).

Thus, by the time the V.W. Kularatne Commission was appointed to investigate ragging reported at the Vidyalankara Campus, the university

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[3] For a detailed discussion of the early development of the Sri Lankan University system up to 1975 (the year of the report under discussion) see de Silva, 1977, 210 and de Silva, Appendix 1.
[4] For discussion of the administrative problems linked to the establishment of the Pirivena Universities see Report of the University Commission, pp. 494-497.

administration was run by a dual system of rule—with both a Vice-Chancellor and a President of a campus.

Student involvement in politics had already seen a violent climax with the 1971 uprising and the atmosphere within the universities seem to have been tense: just before the events recorded in the report student agitations had led to taking over parts of the administrative building as well as the security (Kularatne, 1975, pp. 43-46). The overall mood of the university during the time the teachers arrived seems to have been one of uncertainty and violence.

The earliest reference to the act of ragging I have found is a description of ragging that existed in the University College of Ceylon around 1937 (de Silva, 2004, p. 190). The experience is described by Wimala de Silva in her autobiography Those Phoenix Days. It is possible to surmise from this very early reference to ragging in universities that it is a practice that was probably adopted from the European institutions or British-style preparatory schools.

In 1962 a commission was appointed to look into the situation of the universities of the time including Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara that had newly been converted from their previous Pirivena Status to universities. The report mentions ragging, referring to it as "organized molestation of freshmen in halls of residence" (report of the Universities Commission, 1964, p. 497).

The phrase indicates the violence and the organized nature of ragging. Ragging is seen as a problem of "indiscipline," originating from Medical Faculties and spreading to the Faculties of Science and Engineering (Report of The Universities Commission, 1964, p. 498).

The report describes the rag as a form of depravity and disgrace and does not fail to mention that the institution's intervention in the practice is inadequate, stating that "the prohibitions are ignored and the rags are repeated year after year under the eyes of those in authority without action being taken against them except a few of the most extreme cases" (Report of the Universities Commission, 1964, p. 498).

The report, while acknowledging that ragging is carried out "by a small proportion of undesirable elements who should never have been admitted," also states that "punishments are half-hearted and perfunctory and have no deterrent effect" (Report of the Universities Commission, 1964, p. 498), at once recognizing both the

institutional responsibility for ragging while condemning perpetrators of the rag.

More contemporary studies, however, tend to actively deemphasize this element of institutional responsibility. Bruce Mathews argues for example, that ragging is a result of "an admissions policy that suddenly throws students from widely different social backgrounds together," (Matthews, 1995, p. 87). He points out that this wide class disparity between students who arrive at the university has led to initiation rituals that give those from "underprivileged backgrounds power to "initiate" new students (especially young women and those from the great schools)" (Mathews, 1995, p. 87).

As was pointed out earlier, ragging existed in Sri Lankan universities well before 1958 when stark social differences among the students became apparent and turned divisive. A related argument is the politicized nature of the rag that is linked to class differences within the university arguing that the rag is politically motivated, backed by left-wing student groups including those affiliated with the JVP and the Frontline Socialist Party (Samaranayake 2015; Gunatilaka, 2019; Gamage, 2015; Atukorale and Pinnawala).

Another important thematic interest that can be seen in the literature is the origins of the practice of ragging. Hemamalie Gunatilaka traces the history of ragging to early Greek culture and mentions the forms in which ragging existed in medieval and modern Western universities.

She states that in the United States and Europe, ragging "was a part of the army and English public-school tradition" (Gunatilaka, 2019, p. 93). She quotes Shinde to link the veterans of World War I with the intensification of ragging in American universities, who introduced military-style ragging techniques (Shinde, 2017, p. 664). The effects of such militarist influences on the rag may explain its violent nature and the organized nature of ragging where common techniques are followed.

Several commentators on ragging have also tried to explain the socio-psychological origins of ragging. Siri Gamage's psychological explanation for ragging is "sexual and romantic deprivations of male students who are away from their usual places of residence or birthplaces" (Gamage, 2017, p. 34) admitting quite candidly that the rag is motivated by male competition for women from affluent backgrounds. The competition existed, according to him, not only between seniors, but

also young lecturers and tutors (Gamage, 2017, p. 37). Such speculations shift the focus from the situated, concrete experience of ragging, eliminating its structural, institutional nature altogether.

Many studies on ragging in Sri Lanka also try to assess the impact of ragging on undergraduates. Premadasa et al., have examined the impact of ragging on Dental Sciences students and concluded that fifty percent of the students had experienced some form of ragging including verbal harassment, sexual abuse and psychological abuse (Premadasa et al., 2011, p. 556).

The men tended to be ragged sexually more than women.[5] Other studies had similar conclusions. Atukorale and Pinnawala conclude that there is a relationship between ragging and the socio-economic background of the students; unlike Gamage who tends to speculate that ragging is linked to class jealousy (Gamage, 2017, pp. 36-37), Atukorale and Pinnawala (1998) point out that those from rural areas and low-income families tend to be both raggers and the ragged and therefore the victims of this form of violence at a deeper level (p. 62).

Navaz has examined the impact of the rag on English language education and concludes that students who are already struggling with speaking English are further victimized by ragging, which actively discourages the use of English in everyday life, interacting with lecturers and asking lecturers questions in class (Navaz, 2020, p. 15). But few, if at all, examine the institutional nature of the rag or explore the way it is sustained by practices of university administrations or hierarchical practices the university community holds sacrosanct.

II. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical ground of this study is the concept of structural violence. The term structural violence was first used by Johan Galtung in 1969. Galtung famously defined violence as the "cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is" (Galtung, 1969, p. 168).

In the landmark essay titled "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," Galtung discusses six dimensions that must be considered when defining violence: the distinction between psychological and somatic violence, the negative or positive approach to influence, whether or

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[5] The 1975 report also suggests a similar situation.

not there is an object that is hurt, whether or not there is a subject that hurts, whether the violence is intended or unintended, the distinction between personal and structural violence and the distinction between manifest and latent violence (Galtung 1969, p. 169-172).

The distinction he draws between structural violence and personal violence allows me to mark the structural, institutional nature of the violence involved in ragging. Although ragging can easily be considered a form of personal violence according to Galtung's definition, my study seeks to draw out its structural, impersonal dimension of violence that he identifies in his study.

Bandy X Lee defines structural violence as "avoidable limitations that society places on groups of people that constrain them from meeting their basic needs and achieving the quality of life that would otherwise be possible" (Lee, 2019, p. 123). Lee's theorization allows us to place ragging beyond the "actor-oriented perspective" (Lee, 2019, p. 125) and examine the subtle, institutionalized nature of ragging. As Paul E. Farmer et al. point out in their explanation of structural violence, "the arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people (typically, not those responsible for perpetuating such inequalities)" (Farmer et al., 2006, p. 1686).

Drawing on both Farmer et al. and Lee, I examine two aspects of structural violence that can be traced in ragging: the structural dimensions of ragging and violence embedded in social structures.

Discussions regarding ragging do not occur in a social vacuum. Those who support ragging as well as those who are against it draw on a constellation of points of reference that are situated within their standpoint, political and/or class interests, as well as institutional interests. The V.W. Kularatne Report is particularly interesting in this regard because its mandate was not only to record the incident that sparked off the media controversy but also to identify those who could have prevented it as well as direct perpetrators.

It is possible that such a report would also be politically motivated. The events leading to the appointment hint at a possible tension between the Vice-Chancellor and the President of the Vidyalankara Campus. (Kularatne, 1975, pp. 3-5) but this tension is also productive because

it allows us to see the institutional arrangements, the reluctance to act, attempts to deny the incidents and cover them up (Kularatne, 1975, pp. 51-53 and pp. 31-39).

This institutional agency in preventing ragging is rarely the focus of reports or discussion of ragging, and what we find most often instead is the immediate reality of the perpetrators and victims. Thus, this report, candid in its representation of institutional complicity in ragging, reveals what most other official reports and discussions generally fail to emphasize.

Methodologically, I consider the rag to be a set of practices that exist, ontologically speaking, objectively. And yet, epistemologically, it can only be known in partial, limited ways. As such my methodology treats the problem from a realist ontology but uses interpretive analysis as the epistemological position.

Since so much depends on my own partiality towards the subject, the social location from which I carry out the research must be stated clearly: both as a former student and currently a lecturer at a State University, I have taken an active political stance against ragging.

As someone who actively engages with political issues, particularly those that affect education rights, my analysis is also not drawn from a simplistic condemnation of student politics.[6]

Since I cannot completely rid myself of the influence of my social location and ideological affiliations, I do not claim for this research to be a purely objective one. Instead, its primary epistemological mode is interpretive analysis, and my reading ultimately relies upon a hermeneutical method of reading the information presented in the text.

In other words, this study proceeds from a self-consciously anti-violent (Balibar, 2015, p. 8) point of departure and performs a content analysis that draws on theories of violence and analyzes the content of the report from the standpoint of anti-violence.

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[6] For an example of how anti-ragging activism is also politicized see Gamage, 2017. Here Gamage frames the discussion of ragging through the debate on free education and the politicization of universities by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. This is the flip side of the discourse of student unions and the Inter-University Students' Federation who complain that opposition to ragging is a ploy to curtail free education. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this debate.

III. THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF RAGGING

In this section, I outline three points through which the structural dimension of ragging can be mapped: institutional hierarchy based on seniority, non-institutional links to external political parties among student activists, and the implicit institutional sanctioning of ragging.

While seniority is central to the hierarchy within the entire university structure, ragging displays the way it becomes linked to the body and sustaining obedience and preventing critical questioning of the status quo.

On the other hand, the report is very clear about the way non-institutional links that the students' council and some of its members who were accused of ragging had to an external political party (The Communist Party, discussed below). Thus, non-institutional power structures that affect the university environment can also be noted in this document.

Thirdly, implicit institutional sanctioning of violence, which may appear in the guise of negligence, ignorance, or willful complicity can also be noted in the examples given from the report below.

The rag depicted in the report drew upon the notorious attachment to seniority that plagues the university system. The reporter for The Observer newspaper who was present at the scene of ragging in question notes with bemused horror how "a few were asked to worship the Dean and some other lecturer [sic] who were present. One of them mistaking me for a lecturer even worshipped me!" (Kularatne, 1975, Appendix VIII).

Although critics such as Matthews have tried to portray the rag as a form of protest against authority (Matthews, 1995, p. 87), it becomes clear from this and other witness accounts narrated throughout the report, that the ragging incident began with getting the freshers to worship lecturers. The conservative practice of paying obeisance to elders and teachers was tolerated and perhaps even propagated.

Generally, it is a form of establishing hierarchy, even when practiced in jest or mockery. Such practices must be thought within the larger culture of hierarchical thought in Sri Lankan society, where values such as respecting elders, paying obeisance to people of higher classes and castes or even worshipping politicians or powerful people remain the norm.

Moreover, ragging is considered the "right" of second-year students, because their own subjection to the violence "qualifies" them to practice it on others. Here, seniority is not merely a symbolic difference, but one that is tied to the subjection of the body itself to violence:

> . . . the very same student in his testimony before me, stated that he was ragged when he entered the campus. He developed a stomach ailment the cause of which he traced to a ragging which he was subjected to. It is my belief that this same student ragged a teacher who came for the Diploma Course in Mathematics at the Vidyalankara Campus. The second-year student considers it his inalienable right to rag the first-year student. (Kularatne, 1975, p. 88)

As this evidence shows, the ragged student is left with a sense of entitlement that is not linked to any other achievement except having been subjected to violence. Garg too has identified the same sense of entitlement as a cause of the continuation of ragging (Garg, 2009, p. 266).

Thus, ragging perpetuates hierarchy by drawing on existing conservative forms of displaying obedience and by marking the body with seniority through subjection to violence.

Inefficient and corrupt university administrations and extra-university links between students' councils and political parties outside the university have long been held as a reason that ragging cannot be prevented (Gamage, 2017). The report shows how the institutional power vested in the President of the campus was considered inadequate to take any solid action against perpetrators of ragging. The report quotes a former university president as saying that "the President of a campus does not have the powers of a village headmaster" (p. 84).

It quotes a dean of the campus describing "the office of the President of a campus as a 'forwarding and clearing agency' and a 'rubber stamp'" (p. 84). Such a lack of power on the part of the President is complemented by the way the corruption associated with the administration leads to inaction on the part of other academics as well: "Witness after witness from the teaching staff of the campus has referred to the resultant demoralization when just punishment given to students are withdrawn, due to external

interference" (p. 89).

The crisis in administrative power was exemplified by the power the students wielded in the university. Some students forcibly occupied some rooms in the administration block and took over the security service (p. 44).

Thus, there is a strong breakdown in the institutional structure of the university, that gives student council members a very high level of authority over the administration. The report signals the links the students seem to have had with a major political party of the country at the time. Ten of the students identified by witnesses as perpetrators of the rag and summoned by the commission were represented by Sarath Muttettuwagama, a veteran leftist lawyer[7] (Kularatne, 1975, p. 61).

One of the students accused of perpetrating ragging also mentions that he is a member of the Lanka Jathika Shishya Sangamaya (Kularatne, 1975, p. 66), the student wing of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (p. 66). The student's admission of his political

affiliation and the nature of the ragging he is accused of, when thought together, is a sobering account: Selladurai, a second-year student accused of ragging allegedly ordered the witness A. K. B. Rathnayake "to put his testicles inside an open drawer" with seniors including the accused threatening him with clubs (p. 65).

Given the harrowing nature of the description of ragging involved, the fact that this student had direct links to the Communist Party (which was part of the ruling alliance at the time) and that a prominent lawyer from that party would defend him without the fear of a backlash at a commission hearing speaks to the way ragging seems to have been an accepted part of the contemporary political culture. Extra-university links seemed to have strengthened the students' position.

Such extra-university links that strengthen the students' council are symptomatic of the way most institutional structures in Sri Lankan society would have become politicized even at the time. The students' accusation that the teachers were "pandamkaarayas" (discussed below) indicates the role played by political patronage when it comes to appointments in the state sector (Kularatne p. 12; p.28).

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[7] Muttetuwagama was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and would represent the party in 1977 as an MP in the parliament of Sri Lanka.

Since V.W. Kularatne himself was a strong affiliate of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and tensions within the ruling coalition were already appearing by 1976, the appointment of the commission may have been political, although there is no direct evidence to suggest that this was the case.

In any case, it is clear from the evidence given by both students and the student counsellor that he did not expect a fair inquiry on the matter (p. 51). A false declaration was signed by the victims at the behest of the student leaders that the media reports on the incident were untrue:

> We who were admitted to the Vidyalankara Campus . . . declare and state on oath that there was no ragging of an inhuman nature and that there was little fun and jokes and that the Press and various people exaggerated this in order to take advantage of the situation. (Kularatne p. 31)

While the evidence given before the commission belies this claim, it signals how deep the politicization of the Sri Lankan body politic ran by 1976. The media, the administration and the students were all participating in a broader politicization of various aspects of institutional power. Within the university, ragging became invisible as a crime because it was accepted and sanctioned. Within the larger society, the politicization of ragging and university administration lead to a chaotic disregard of the anti-democratic practices cultivated by student leaders with the backing of prominent politicians.

Raggers derive power through institutional sanctioning or non-action when they practice violence upon newcomers. It is clear from several accounts in the report that student council members either directly engaged in ragging or defended those who ragged. They drew their political power from several institutional sources: their institutional power as elected members of the council recognized by the university as the legitimate representatives of students, their close association at least with some of the staff members (who seem to have supported them and tried to cover up the incident),[8] and the laid-back attitude of the administration towards the violation of university laws.

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[8] The report describes how the Student Counsellor failed to reveal the names of the raggers and take disciplinary action against them because he felt that the "Vice-Chancellor would have taken action against these students without any inquiry" (p. 51).

Internal institutional politics also seem to have played a role: "It is in evidence that some scheming members of the academic staff attempt to enlist the cooperation of student bodies to further their own ends. The elective principle for the election of a Dean, President and a Vice-Chancellor, can in an indirect way draw in the student element for a warfare among academics" (p. 86).

The commission report repeatedly shows and definitively concludes that the President of the Campus, Prof. M. G. Perera, Student Counsellor K. P. V. Karunaratne, Assistant Student Counsellor Chandrasiri Palliyaguru, and Sub-Warden N. Jayasekera Aratchchi, either deliberately or through negligence failed to prevent the rag and act according to their duties. All four were very clearly aware that ragging was happening but they either chose to ignore it or take no action.

I shall quote one conclusion of the report in detail to show the very clear complicity between the raggers and the Assistant Student Counsellor:

> He stated that on the 5th, when he was in the senior common room he was informed by an official of the Science students' union that there was some trouble at the students' centre. Palliyaguru stated that on receipt of this information, he together with a few other lecturers went in that direction and saw about 400 students surrounding 50 to 60 Diploma teachers who obviously were participating in the rag. According to Palliyaguru, he advised them to leave and within about 5 minutes they dispersed. He could not, he said, identify a single of these students. He did not take any steps to identify these students as there were about 400 students and he too went there with a certain amount of trepidation. He said he had no right to order them to stop the ragging. He could only advise. Indeed Mr. Palliyaguru was not quite sure whether preventive action of this sort was part of his duties. . . apart from the incidents of the 5th, he was not aware of any ragging on the 3rd and 4th February 1975. This itself is an admission of his ineffectiveness as an Assistant Student Counsellor. It is inconceivable that he, though admittedly present

in the campus premises, was unaware of what was going on. There is every reason to believe that he knew what was happening but did not take any preventive steps. (Kularatne, 1975, p. 51-52)

It is rare that an incident where around 400 people surrounding 50-60 provoke such complacence in someone who has institutional power to prevent the violence. Moreover, the fact that the campus authorities claim throughout the inquiry that they were unaware of the ragging and the commission's conclusion that the student counsellor deliberately withheld the names of the raggers shows that the administration was complicitous with the ragging (Kularatne, 1975, p. 51-52).

The Commission found all four officials to have been directly responsible for not taking necessary action to prevent the ragging. If ragging is sporadic and limited to personal violence, it could not be sustained in such distinguishable continuity over decades. I conclude that the 1975 Commission Report depicts the way the rag draws on the institutional hierarchies, power structures, and corrupt and weak administrations are institutional forms of structural violence that

enable ragging.

IV. RAGGING EMBEDDED IN SOCIAL STRUCTURES

The second criterion I use to examine whether the rag can be considered a form of structural violence is its embeddedness in social structures.

Here, we can examine how far the social norms about masculinity and femininity and class differences in society, ethno-religious identity, etc. play a role in perpetuating the rag as a practice that goes beyond individual actors. The V. W. Kularatne Commission Report does not focus on how existing social structures affect ragging. The evidence provided by the various witnesses, however, signals the way social differences are mobilized in ragging and I identify three points that can be mapped onto the way ragging perpetuates socially embedded forms of domination: class, sense of meritocratic entitlement and gender.

The rag functions as a means of constructing cohesion[9] among students from various classes by

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9. For a discussion of the way ritualistic practices linked to ragging create group cohesion see the discussion on Dependency Theory in Keller et al. (2015: pp. 28-29).

mobilizing class disparities that generally exist in society. However, rather than challenge these disparities critically, the raggers saw class through a superficial lens that plays right into dominant ideologies about class.

The circumstances under which the teachers arrived at the university for the Mathematics Diploma were different from a general student intake into the university. The raggers saw the teachers as beneficiaries of corrupt political practices. The teachers were perceived as "pandamkaarayaas" (those who have gained political or other privileges by bootlicking politicians) (p. 28): "We were asked to sing and dance . . . And then I think we were made to repeat some statement saying that we came into the university through political backing— something like this— "manthrige aadharayen vishva vidyalayata aapu aya". We were made to utter some undesirable words" (p. 28). Halpe Gurusinghe Perera, who was ragged severely, states in his testimony that "Another one asked, "Didn't you get your appointment by holding pandam to Members of Parliament?" One asked "How did you fellows come to the University with S.S.C. passes? Come! We will teach you fellows" (p. 12).

The class jealousy at work here is not tied to class disparities between the students and the mathematics teachers; it is tied to the system of political patronage linked to employment. The teachers were singled out as enemies because their appointments were thought to be illegitimate. Given the thorny nature of graduate employment and employability, the feeling that the teachers were political lackeys would have been an easy way to mobilize class antipathy towards them.

But whatever criticism the raggers may have had of the system (there is no indication in the report that they engaged in any critical conversations regarding the topic) their criticism did not seem to reach beyond a simple antipathy towards the teachers' perceived political allegiances. Rather, they use indiscriminate violence against people whose class situation does not seem to be that different from their own.

There seems to be no real critical engagement with how class domination may have affected their uncertain future and no attempt to initiate such a discussion with the teachers. What they seem to worry about was their sense of entitlement to upward social mobility, which they thought should be denied to teachers who did not deserve it.

Thus, while raggers did not reinforce the existing class differences by enacting them directly within the rag (the privileged ragging the under-privileged, for example) or by exhibiting expressions of jealousy, they appealed to a class entitlement based on the values of a meritocracy that signaled potential upward mobility for themselves.

The cohesion built around the practice of ragging was tied, often, to that sense of entitlement[10] linked to the powerful meritocracy dominant in Sri Lanka. The treatment towards Halpe Garusinghe Perera (described above) changed when he managed to convince the raggers that he was, in fact, fully qualified to come to university: "They asked me suspiciously why I was not selected to the University with these results. At this stage, I understood that they believed me to possess adequate qualifications for admission to the University" (p. 13). After being severely ragged both physically and sexually, the same witness describes how the raggers also extended their friendship to him: "This person asked me twice "Do you know my

name now? I do not remember the names of the other people. They told me that whenever I meet them, I should smile and address them as "machan", instead of putting on airs" (p. 12).

The above description shows that ragging is an exercise of building group cohesion through violent means. Sadly, however, to be accepted into the group, one must subscribe to the ideology of meritocracy and be willing to be seen as exclusive.

Rather than develop a sense of self-worth and dignity, the rag works to construct a vexed cohesion among students and instill in them a sense of meritocratic entitlement. It is not clear if the rag practiced on the teachers was somehow more severe than that practiced on regular students, but a generalized feeling that the teachers were not qualified enough to study at the university seems to have existed. The deep-seated and paradoxical biases spawned by this meritocracy shape the consciousness of university students and such attitudes towards entitlement were perpetuated through the rag.

Attitudes of entitlement tied to intellectual merit are also a tool of power, a structure of domination existing in society because it perpetuates the difference between the educated and the uneducated.

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10. A comparable example is the way ragging (hazing) led to a sense of "entitlement" that is associated with Greek Fraternities (Syrett, 2009, p. 153)

Such attitudes lead students to become more parochial, driven by a false sense of self-worth derived from this sense of entitlement. This sense of entitlement would also function as a nascent identification with their potential class position, undergirded by a feeling of intellectual merit.

Thus, the class politics at work in the rag is not a simple expression of class jealousy. It is a complex mechanism for identity building and group cohesion around the idea of intellectual exclusivity.

Gender seems to affect the intensity of ragging: male students were subjected to more severe physical ragging than female students while psychological ragging was severe for both genders. Several witnesses reported that they were asked to be naked, had witnessed others being naked, and were often asked to perform various sexual acts, including masturbating each other (Kularatne p. 11-12). Several were also subjected to physical ragging and humiliating behaviour. The fact that the physical ragging had a well-developed set of commands and actions and the shared common language to indicate these acts shows how deeply structural ragging is. Terms such as "swimming (to India, Sri Lanka, America), "cycle", "dope" "wheelbarrow" etc., refer to various poses and actions that were physically straining (Kularatne p. 11-22).

In addition, the sexual acts that the teachers were asked to perform were fairly uniform, which indicates that these were common practices known to all, and not sporadic or invented by individual raggers. Thus, even by the time this commission inquiry was held, a sub-culture organized around cruel forms of torture seemed to exist.

The highly organized nature of ragging, as well as the common set of terminology developed within the university, reminds one of that early description of the rag as a form of "organized molestation" (p. 497) by the Report of the Ceylon University Commission. The keyword here is "organized" from the point of view of my study. It refers to a certain set of spatio-temporal social arrangements that sanction the rag within certain given spaces and time.

For example, throughout the commission report there are several examples of how senior students heckle with lecturers and instances of lecturers resisting the heckling (Kularatne pp. 29-30). This can only happen if there is an unwritten arrangement that ragging can occur after the lecture.

The spatial arrangements of the rag seem to be organized around rooms in the administrative block, the playground, some lecture halls and Siberia (an abandoned area used for sexual intercourse by campus couples).[11] Severe physical ragging could not exist without a high level of organization that had to be sanctioned at some level both culturally and institutionally.

For those who see the rag as a resistant practice, the V.W. Kularatne report provides a powerful wake-up call. The practices imposed on the teachers (and possibly other freshers of the university) are symptomatic of the conservative and heterosexual norms that pervade the rag. With men, the physical ragging bordered on torture and the enjoyment derived from torturing others. Men were constantly asked to masturbate in front of others or masturbate each other. The power to command humiliating practices on others legitimizes power (the power of the individual perpetrator and the institutional power s/he draws on when making such a demand).

Moreover, the heterosexist thrust of acts such as asking a man to perform a sexual act on a tree or a crude sketch of a woman drawn on a wall sets up, indeed, a matrix of power in which men are consistently placed as active overpowering partners over passive female victims.[12] There is no critical engagement with the power dynamics of patriarchal heterosexist power in these acts. Instead, a pervasive hegemonic masculinity that derives power by humiliating and overpowering the other is perpetuated.

Women, on the other hand, were largely subjected to sexually inflected psychological ragging/harassment and humiliation. Some were harassed in front of their parents or other family members. The most embarrassing for women was the use of obscenity and the demand made on them to repeat obscenities.

The use of obscene language, for example, made the more culturally modest students feel vulnerable,

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[11] For a discussion of the physical and spatial organization and conditions of the places referred to in the report see Kularatne pp. 82-83.

12. One could also argue that acts of masturbation performed on each other and nudity etc. Can also be a form of homoerotic pleasure can also be made here. There is little evidence in the report itself to support this claim, although it would have been possible. For a discussion about the potential for developing homoerotic subcultures that exist around ragging see (Syrett, 2009, pp. 268-270)

which, coupled with the sense of modesty and respectability actively cultivated culturally in women,[13] turned the rag into a sharp psychological tool used against women.

We cannot consider these practices as a violation of Victorian sexual norms. Instead, the perpetrator's pleasure and the victim's humiliation are tied to notions of feminine respectability, that are generally conservative and oppressive. The very demand that the women repeat obscenities relies upon the assumption that they can't. Rather than challenge false notions of modesty and respectability by engaging with the female students through a critical dialogue (which the raggers could very easily have done), they mobilized normative gender behaviours to cause humiliation and embarrassment to women, particularly in front of their families, reinforcing the power of the patriarchal family and systemic forms of gendered violence.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that ragging that exists in Sri Lankan universities has a structural

dimension that is rarely discussed in studies on ragging. Drawing on theories of structural violence, I have traced the structural dimensions of violence and violence embedded in social structures as two forms of structural violence that can be found in ragging.

I have examined the 1975 V. W. Kularatne report titled "Incidents of Ragging Reported at the Vidyalankara Campus," to trace the structural violence of ragging. This document gives us access to the descriptions of individual acts of ragging, the institutional setup, the response of the administration, the public responses, and the recommendations.

The report has historical value as well as current topical value as things seem to have changed little over time. In structural forms of violence, what ultimately becomes lethal to victimized communities is not brutal murder or rape or torture but the slow, invisible, institutionalized forms of starvation or deprivation.

Similarly, what ultimately has proved lethal to the university community is not simply the occasional deaths of students caused by ragging, which authorities forget after a few sensationalized responses but the slow destruction of critical

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[13] For a discussion of the colonial construction of such respectability in Sri Lankan Women, see de Alwis,1997, pp. 105-143)

thinking and engagement, the gradual waning of confidence, personality and moral discipline required of students to thrive in an academic environment.

I have proposed in this paper that to bring institutional responsibility back into the discussion on how ragging can be prevented, we must first recognize the structural violence that lies at the heart of the rag. Any preventive action must begin with a reform of how university administrations view student violence and ragging.

This report also shows that there is no good rag/bad rag dichotomy with a "good rag" in the past, where ragging was "just fun." Over a very long time, it has been an insidious form of violence that cultivates mediocrity among students and sustains the most redundant forms of hierarchies that are detrimental to the intellectual growth of any community.

Because our universities are notorious for in-breeding, incestuous practices of recruitment and cult-like maintenance of in-group thinking, ragging must be seen as the first link in a chain of violent practices that destroy the academic community from within.

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PLANTATION SYSTEM IN TRANSITION: A STUDY ON CHANGING PATTERNS OF LAND, PRODUCTION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE TEA PLANTATION SECTOR OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The Plantation economy was introduced during the British colonial rule in Sri Lanka and it was described as the 'backbone of the economy' and they were owned by the multinational companies for a long period of time. The post- independence government of the country repeatedly announced the need of nationalization of privately owned enterprises and mainly targeted the nationalization of the wealth of the plantation sector which became a reality through successful implementation of land reforms in 1970s. Thus the major objective of the study is to investigate the factors that contributed to the transition of plantation system. The study adopted a mixed method design and presents both qualitative and quantitative evidence using content analysis method. The article focuses on three major areas: persistent changes in the plantation system and their implications, rapid changes in extent of tea and production and their impact on the tea industry and the changes in employment pattern and income of the workers in the plantations. The study finds that the share of the large-scale estate sector has gradually declined over time and demonstrates the growing contribution of the tea smallholdings sector towards tea production. The article informs the policy makers as well as RPCs and SPs over the significant policy, institutional and governance failures in Sri Lanka to sustain the age-old large scale tea plantations which made Sri Lanka proud internationally in the name of well known "Ceylon Tea".

Key words: *Plantation sector, Employment, Income, Wages, Nationalization and Privatization*

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INTRODUCTION

The plantation system was established during the British colonial period in Sri Lanka which is more than hundred and fifty years old now. This system now is in tremendous transition due to changes in economic, social and political spheres of the country. The plantation system was described as the 'backbone of the economy' despite several development policies introduced by the successive governments during the1960s and 1970s in the country. For example, the average share of total export income derived from the plantation economy that largely includes crops such as tea, rubber and coconut was 15.33 percent in 2000 whereas it was 15.90 percent in 2020. This clearly indicates the stable contribution of this sector (CBSL, 2001, 2020; Ganewatta and Edwards, 2000). The plantation sector directly and indirectly provides employment opportunities for millions of people in the country. In this context, it is pertinent to recollect the statement made by the visiting economist Nicholas Kalder in the late 1950s which still makes sense in this regard. He stated that "Ceylon owes its present prosperity to plantation economy and the wealth of the nation depends on the rapid development of

plantation economy" (Nicholas, 1959, p. 25). In this backdrop, the paper intends to investigate changing dynamics, patterns and transitions emerging in the age-old plantation system of Sri Lanka and similar patterns in other tea-growing countries such as India, Kenya, and Malawi. Hence, the paper will be relevant to other contexts to explore such changes in the tea industry.

Apparently, the post-independence governments have taken a new path for the development of the country. This was to transform the major colonial economic activities into nation's own economic activities. As such, nationalization of privately owned enterprises was a prominent objective of the economic policy of the governments. The major target was nationalization of the wealth of the plantation sector that was owned by the multinational companies of Rupees and Sterling. Hence, the nationalization policy was implemented through land reforms in 1972 and 1975. The enactment of land reforms was successfully conducted and the entire plantation sector owned by the multinational companies was nationalized. The nationalized plantation sector was distributed locally to reach the major goals of the land reforms. Similar kinds of changes had also taken place in

India. For instance, since independence, the Government of India and the concerned state governments have introduced various policy measures which included rigorous taxation, restraints on export of capital and efforts to build up Indian auctions to control the British companies. In 1970, the Government of India abolished the managing agency system and thus the activities of British managing agencies were restricted to a large extent. The measures taken by the government of Kerala and Tamil Nadu were mainly of two kinds: drastic amendment of the existing tax laws so that British controlled companies were called upon to pay a considerably higher rate of tax on their agricultural income; and the land ceiling legislations which were mainly intended for restricting the reserve area that could be held near the existing area under the crop (George, 1984: 42).

In the case of Sri Lanka, after the nationalization, the tea plantation crops were distributed to the village farmers who became the successful tea smallholding agronomists in the country. The patronage given by the government institutes like the Ministry of Plantation Industry, Tea Smallholding Authority, Tea Research Institutes, Tea Shakathi programme etc. have significantly contributed to the development of

tea smallholdings. Currently, there are 400,000 tea small holders with the total extent of 121,000 hectares amounting to 61 percent of the tea land in the country which contributed 74 percent of the total tea production in 2020.

However, the tea plantation sectors that were initially under the state control and subsequently privatized in 1992 are faced with various crises at present. They are, the crisis associated with the management of the RPC, and the one associated with the estate workers. According to the RPC management, the major crisis is incurring losses mainly from production of tea, higher labour cost, depreciation in auction price, low level of labour productivity, shortage of labour supply to carry out the capital investment etc. (Rajadurai 2020). Apart from that, stereotype of work for both the male and female in the estates, the difficulties to get their retirement benefits such as EPF&ETF at their retirement, commencement of diversification projects such as extent of forest plantation and vegetable cultivation, indirect promulgation of retrenchment actions taken by the estate management etc. have significantly contributed to the declining of RPCs and SPs tea estates in the country(Ramesh.2018). As far as the workers' point of view is concerned, the workers do not get

a sufficient number of hours of work in the estates to receive the wage income determined at the Collective Agreement (CA) to make ends meet. The housing conditions are poor. Many tea estate workers are still living in the line rooms which were constructed by the British with poor health care and the provision of national health care system has still not reached the estate workers (Chandrabose, 2021). Hence, it is necessary to study the competency of the 'plantation system' which employed a substantial labour force in the country and was considered as the center of wealth of the nation. There have been several studies on the plantation industry in Sri Lanka and elsewhere so that the next section focuses on reviewing relevant theories and literature to identify a gap to be filled by this study. The rest of the article is organized as follows: second section deals with the theoretical insights, third section explains the methodology, fourth section examines the results and discussions under three parts: persistent changes in the plantation system and their implications, rapid changes in extent of tea and production and their impact on the tea industry and the changes in employment pattern and income of the workers in the plantations. The last section provides the conclusions and policy implications emerging from the results and discussion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing evidence shows that tea is one of the most frequently consumed beverages across the world and adored by all age groups (George, 1984; Ganewatta and Edwards, 2000; Mitra, 1991; Kumarihami and Song, 2018). However, according to tea industry professionals, the world tea growing countries are facing sustainability challenges in global tea industry and there have been constant transitions. These changes are taking place in terms of labour, productivity, cost of production, wages, global prices, marketing, government policies towards the tea industry etc. As such, labor productivity is known to be linked to three factors in tea plantation scenario; wages, incentives, and social-economic considerations. Most of the laborers in tea plantations are on temporary basis and receive daily wages, often still very low with a fixed price per kilogram of green leaf picked (Thushara (2015); Hicks (2009); Ganewatta (2000); Hicks (2001) Van Der Wal (2008); Mitra, (1991). Hence, their income may vary with the skill, working hours, health, strength, and production season. Further, urbanization causes the rural depopulation as

smallholders and rural workers are moving to cities to seek higher wages and better lifestyles and the rural depopulation creates labor shortages in the industry. This continues to cause a serious crisis in terms of productivity improvement and labour retention. Further, the young generations are reluctant to work in plantations, thus, the mechanization is inevitable, along with imported labor (Ganewatta, 2000; Van Der Wal, 2008; Kumarihami and Song, 2018). For a sustainable tea industry, replanting rate should be at a minimum 2 percent per annum of the total area under tea cultivation. Nevertheless, replanting in tea plantations has not been well practiced in several tea growing countries. For example, the replanting rate in the corporate tea sector in Sri Lanka is very low, only 0.7 percent as recorded during 1993-2002. This implies that, to increase the production, raising productivity is of paramount importance. Because of the revision of fertilizer prices, growers are using less fertilizer which is ultimately affecting production yield and product quality. Additionally, the recent banning of weedicides without the provision of a suitable alternative has led to growers having to resort to manual weeding which is time-consuming and impractical and this in turn has negatively

impacted core processes and the quality of the final product (Kumarihami and Song, 2018; Thushara (2015); Hicks (2009); Ganewatta (2000); Hicks (2001) Van Der Wal (2008).

Amongst many publications in Sri Lanka, the Tea Master Plan (TMP) of 1978 gives a wide range of suggestions for the improvement of tea plantation sector of Sri Lanka. The plan envisaged that there is a lot of potential for increasing employment on tea estates through enhancing the productivity. Accordingly, the yield level of 900 kilograms per hectare had been able to provide employment only to 1.98 workers, whereas that of increased yield by 1,680 kilograms would absorb 4.06 workers. Thus the TMP emphasizes that the economics of the well-being of the country depends on the expansion of the tea plantation sector.

As far as increasing the production of tea and employment opportunities are concerned, the Medium Term Investment Programmes (1983-87), implemented particularly in the large scale tea estates that came under the purview of Janatha Estate Development Board (JEDB) and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC) have given high priority to the resuscitation of the tea sector through

comprehensive "estate to estate investment programme" meant to generate employment and increase production. Under this, a huge amount of investment was made for filling vacancies of tea bushes mainly in the JEDB and SLSPC tea estates.

The study on 'labour absorption in the Plantation Crop Sector of Sri Lanka' compiled by Dharmapriya Wesumperuma et al. (1985), examines labour use and employment patterns in the plantation sector. The study attempts to identify the potential for further labour absorption in the industry. The publication has five chapters and gives the performance of all three planation crops i.e. tea, rubber and coconut in the country. The study reveals that all three plantation crops depend on regular supply of manual labour force for the production. Therefore, fulfillment of employment opportunity is inevitable for plantation crops. Thus, the sector continues to play one of the major employment providing sectors in the country. The authors also state the need for accelerating replanting activities in the plantation crops rather than intercropping system in the planation. According to the study, the authors have disagreed with the idea of intercropping activities in the plantation, particularly in tea crops and mention, 'intercropping

is not technically feasible in tea'. The study highlights, the failure of a series of policy reforms in the plantation sector in terms of retaining the plantation system in the country. Nimal Sandaratne (1984) in an article published in Staff Studies suggested that the tea sector is in a position to increase the employment opportunities through implication of diversification of agricultural and other income generating activities.

The ARTEP working paper by Amarasinghe and Sinnathnmby (1993) on 'Recent Trends in Employment and Productivity in the Plantation sector of Sri Lanka with special Reference to the Tea sector' gives the outlook of changing pattern of plantation system while transforming the ownership of tea plantation sector in the country which took place in 1992. The author Amarasinghe is critical about the transformation of both the management and welfare activities of the workers to the privatized plantation sector in the country. The author is skeptical about the transformation and states that the privatized estate management will be fully occupied in the improvement of production and profitability, but enriching the social welfare of the workers is an incompatible task. In his view, the provision of social benefits will be in the hands of the government and it should be executed through

the proposed Central Monitoring Board (CMB). However, the proposed CMB was inactive in the privatized tea estates and the proposal was not materialized. As far as Sinnathamby's contribution is concerned, he critically demonstrated the changing patterns of privatization of the plantation sector. He has predicted that productivity will increase due to closer supervision and efficient management under the privatization of the plantation sector. However, he forecasted that there will be always a tug-of-war between the management and the trade unions with regard to resolving the issues related to earnings of the estate workers. The author reiterated that the inefficiency of the estates managed by the state sector corporation of JEDB and SLSPC was the major cause for the vulnerable situation of the tea sector as a whole.

David Dunham (1998) and others also have analyzed the future labour supply and possible management responses on tea estates in Sri Lanka. The study also states that the young workers may in future have very good reasons to look for jobs elsewhere, if the strategies of tea estate management do not change to meet the changing aspirations of the youth. The Labour Force Survey also reveals the high unemployment rate in the plantation sector.

Accordingly, the unemployment rate in the district of Nuwara Eliya was 6.7 percent in 1985 and it increased to 22.2 percent in 1995. Similar tendency can be observed in the district of Badulla where the unemployment rate has increased to 19.1 percent from 8.7 percent between 1985 and 1995.

A study conducted by CARE international in 1998 reveals the level of education and unemployment in the district of Nuwara Eliya. In the case of unemployment, 12 percent had studied up to GCE O/L and this figure for Badulla was 16 percent. The report also demonstrates the unwillingness of the educated youth who have studied up to GCE O/L to do manual jobs in the estate. The ILO study on Employment and Unemployment Situation in Selected Plantation Districts and Creation of Employment Opportunities (1999) reveals that there is a mismatch between available jobs in the estate and employment aspirations. The study also found the trend of unwillingness of the educated youth (those who went up to GCE O/L) to do parental jobs in the estates. Moreover, the study also shows that a considerable number of educated youth prefer to accept employment opportunities in the factory, though limited within the estates and not readily available in the

vicinity of the estates.

The study conducted by Dishanka Sajitha and Ikemota Yukio (2013) covering the tea estates from high-grown tea areas in Nuwara Eliya and Badulla districts in 2012 illustrates the relationship between income and performance of the estate workers. The study identified seven broad areas related to the level of social development of tea estate workers and approachable labour practices of RPCs to address labour related issues in improving the living conditions and labour productivity of the tea plantation sector in Sri Lanka. The study identified that the main cause behind this low labour productivity is the low level of social development of the tea estate community which apparently impacted on their abilities and, eventually created negative effects on their production. Finally, the study discusses the importance of converting tea estate workers and their families into tea small-farmers and adopting small-scale farming practice within the plantation sector through the contract farming system. The study also illustrates the inefficiency of retaining the plantation system by the RPCs as well. Thus, the above discussion on the plantation sector indicates the dearth of work on changing dynamics and recent transitions

taking place in this industry. Therefore, this paper investigates the existing challenges of the plantation system with a view to significantly contributing to the policy discussion on the potential reforms of plantation sector in near future. In this backdrop, the following three questions are to be explored in this paper.

1. What are the factors that have contributed to the transition of plantation system in Sri Lanka?

2. What is the current extent of tea land and tea production in the plantations?

3. What is the current status of the plantation sector and its potential in providing continuous employment to the tea workers in the future?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed method design and presents both qualitative and quantitative evidence collected through various sources. The annual publications of the Ministry of Plantation Industry, Annual Reports of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys and Annual reports of Regional Plantation Companies and other relevant secondary data were used for this study and we employed content

analysis method to review all the secondary evidence collected for this paper. In Sri Lanka, the term 'plantation' denotes the traditional crops of tea, rubber and coconut as well as oil palm, cashew, sugarcane and forestry. However, this paper is confined to the large-scale tea estates managed by the RPCs & State Plantations (SPs) in the country. Presently, the tea crops have also been considerably extended to the Tea Smallholding sector and it comes under the purview of Tea Small Holding Authority (TSHA) and Tea Commissioner of the Sri Lanka (TC). However, the TSHA and TC are not considered for this study. The study also used statistics to explain the plantation economy from 1990-2020. The abbreviations RPCs & SPs are used for the Regional Plantation Companies & State Plantations respectively and the terminologies of 'Plantation system', 'Plantation sector', 'Estate sector' and 'Estate management' have been interchangeably used in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings and discussion section has three parts and the first part deals with persistent changes in the plantation system and their implications, second part examines the rapid changes in the extent of

tea and production and their impact on the tea industry, and third part explicates the changes in employment pattern and income of the workers in the plantations.

Plantation system, persistent changes and their implications

A plantation system is an economy based on the agricultural mass production, and stable products grown in a large farm are called plantations. Plantation crops usually need processing immediately after harvesting. The crops such as tea, sugarcane and palm oil are most suited for plantation crops, but the coconut, and rubber are suitable to a lesser extent (Mandale R Jay.1972). Sri Lanka's plantation system was considered by the British as economies of scale to produce tea, rubber and coconut. After the destruction of the coffee plantations in the 1870s, the crops tea, rubber and coconut were planted in the island. The tea seeds of both Chinese and Assamese origin were brought down and the first commercial plot of tea was planted in the island in 1867. Since then, tea plantations have fast gained popularity among the plantation crops. Sri Lanka's coconut plantations are usually dispersed along the country's coastal belt while commercial coconut plantation was introduced

in 1860. Rubber seedlings were introduced to Sri Lanka in 1877. This sector is characterized by the ability to obtain large extents of viable land for the expansion of plantation crops in the country. The arrival of the South Indian Tamil workers to be employed for the expansion of plantation also contributed to boosting the plantation system in the country. The plantation system is also popularly known as the 'estate sector' in Sri Lanka.

However, the efficiency of plantation crops under the British entrepreneurs has been gradually declining in Sri Lanka. The plantation system, claimed to have an extensive land area, a large labour force and central management system mostly by the multinational companies were considered as the greater economies of scale for the plantation system and such economies of scale do not exist for small estates and do not have means to maximize the harvest (Myrdal, 1968). Moreover, the plantation sector is orderly, i.e. the trees are in rows, estate managers are well educated, have cars and live in big houses, estates use large-scale modern methods and profit maximization as their goals and therefore, must make more economic use of resources than the small estates (Penny and Zulkifli,1963). The observation

made by the Indian National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in 1977 on tea plantations in Darjeeling revealed that the low productivity of tea exists on the estates with less than 100 hectares and relatively extremely low productivity occurs on estates with less than 50 hectares. Mahindra Lama (1987) confirms that these small tea estates are operating under diseconomies of scale.

The National Planning Council in Sri Lanka was convinced that the tea plantation as a whole is exceptionally efficient, therefore, suggestions for making blocks 'sub-economic' would impair the plantation system. As a result, in 1958 fragmentation bill was brought to prevent dividing tea and rubber estates in to small parcels (Patrick Mendis,1991). However, the report of the Census of Tea Smallholdings in Sri Lanka conducted in 1983 states that there is no correlation between size and yield and suggested that tea cultivation does not need to be considered as scale economies. According to Patrick Mendis (1991), both the large scale and small scale estates might still be subject to diseconomies of scale depending on how they use pouts in tea cultivation and concluded based on the Cobb-Douglas production function model, that

the smaller estates are operating at a relatively higher efficiency level than larger tea estates.

The observation made by Chiranjeevi (1993) in his book, 'Tea Economy of India' states that the large scale tea gardens are burdened with various taxes and the profits after the taxes are not sufficient enough to undertake re-investment in the tea industry in West Bangal in India. Therefore, the extensions, replanting and infillings etc. have been envisaged mainly by the individual producers. The author also asserts that in West Bengal, the number of medium size holdings with above 100 and less than 400 hectares comprise the lower size class. The study on Privatization of Tea Plantations by Shanmugaratnam (1997) has illustrated the competency of the Sri Lankan firms that succeed to become the management agents. According to the author, the management agents i.e. RPC never had the experiences of large scale enterprises and the complexity of the plantation sector. Their financial capacity is not adequate at all to meet the challenges. Their own experience in plantation was limited and they have been able to hire former estate managers and staff. Thus, they have not satisfactorily handled the social complexity of the estate management system.

The above arguments and findings show the incompetence of managing the plantation sector by the local enterprises. The study conducted in West Bengal in India also reveals more or less the similar experiences of managements of the plantation sector in Sri Lanka. As mentioned in the introduction of this study above, though various interpretations had been given for nationalization of plantation sector by the governments of Sri Lanka, the governments also took necessary measures to retain the large extent of tea crops under the existing plantation system and ensured gaining of foreign exchange from exports of its production. Coincidently, the existing estate workers also were compelled to stay back in the plantation sector, identified as a unique population of 'plantation community' or 'estate sector community' in the country.

The measures taken by the government to retain the plantation system can be divided in to four phases as mentioned below.

1. Nationalization of the foreign owned plantations.

2. Distribution of nationalized plantation sector among the village farmers.

3. Retaining the nationalized plantation sector with state control.

4. Privatization of a large extent of the state owned plantation.

A total of 419,101 hectares of plantation crops in Sri Lanka were nationalized through the implementation of the Land Reform Act No.2 of 1972 and Act No. 39 of 1975. The implementation of successive land reforms had brought about many challenges for the century old plantation system in the country. The nationalized plantation crops were distributed to three main institutes: (1) Public Sector Agency - 234,156 hectares i.e. 62.23 percent; (2) Co-operative Sector- 106,435 hectares i.e. 28.19 percent; and (3) Peasant or Smallholding Farmers- 35,815 hectares i.e. 9.58 percent (Peris,1994). In addition to the above, the nationalized plantations were also distributed among a number of state owned organizations to initiate various diversification projects. The National Agricultural Diversification Authority (NADSA) which was established in 1976 was endowed with around 10,000 hectares of plantation land for the implementation of World Bank funded diversification projects and the Indian Tamil workers who lived in those estate were immediately evacuated as they did not have citizenship and, the land was distributed among 4500 families in the districts of Kegalle and Kandy (Sunil Bastian, 1984). Apart from this, the marginal tea lands in the district of Kandy were also identified as reservations for catchment areas for various hydropower projects under the accelerated Mahaweli development project in the country.

Consequently, the large extent of plantation sector crops of tea, rubber and coconut that were concentrated in the western and southern districts of the country were fragmented and distributed mainly to the individual families of the village farmers to start small scale farming on their own. A considerable number of rural farmers who were traditionally engaged in subsistence agriculture shifted from producing large scale crops to small scale tea plots in the country. Cultivating tea in small plots has given a new life to traditional rural farmers particularly in the Southern Districts of Ratnapura, Kegalle, Kalutara, Galle and Matara. The Ministry of Plantation Industry established in 1975 and the newly established Tea Smallholding Authority (TSHA) have been facilitating farmers engaged in cultivating small tea plots popularly known as 'tea

smallholdings' in Sri Lanka. In fact, tea smallholdings are not a new sector created in the country as this sector had evolved along with the establishment of the plantation system. However, the contribution from tea smallholdings was insignificant until the 1970s and it was not considered as having 'economies of scale'. As of now, tea smallholdings are the frontline sector in terms of tea production in the country.

The frequent changes in the distribution of nationalized plantations led to the growth of tea smallholdings. The nationalized land distributed to the public sector agencies had undergone several changes from 1st April 1976 to December 1978. Accordingly, 57.9 percent of lands were distributed to the public plantation corporations and the remaining were distributed to the private sector. Among the public sector agencies, JANATHA Estate Development Board (JEDB) had received a total land extent of 62,346 hectares and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC) 63,034 hectares towards the end of 1978 (Sunil Bastian,1984). However, the two public corporations continuously proved that they not only lacked proper management strategies but also failed to increase productivity and failed to improve the working conditions and welfare of the

workers. (Amarasinghe,1993; Sinathamby,1993). The two state corporations were also not sufficiently equipped with any market incentives in any of their operations and ended up in a bureaucratic gridlock. Therefore, it was decided to transfer the management of these two corporations to private management companies (Gamage and Wickramaratne, 2020). A total of 457 tea estates comprising of 94,521 hectares of state owned tea plantations of both the JEDB and SLSPC were handed over to the 23 RPCs in 1992. It should be noted that, while transferring the tea land to the RPCs, the state corporations, JEDB and SLSPC had also retained a total of 12,058 hectares of tea land along with its labour force to continue tea plantation activities.

The major challenges faced by the RPCs were to provide work for the registered workers, welfare facilities and wages as stipulated in the Estate labour (Indian) Ordinance. These were similar to the issues faced by the previous management of the state owned corporations (1976 to 1992) who however directly handled these challenges. Nevertheless, unlike the state owned corporations, the RPCs did not want to be directly involved in the welfare programs of their workers, and hence set up the Plantation Housing and Social

Welfare Trust (PHSWT) in 1992 to administer the welfare programmes of the workers. The PHSWT was subsequently renamed as the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) in 2002. As far as the determination of wages is concerned, the RPCs have not been in agreement to collaborate with the Wages Board for a Collective Agreement (CA) from the initial stages of estate privatization.

However, none of these changes had an effect on the social life of the estate workers. The management of both the RPCs & SPs retained the plantation workers in accordance with the Estate Labour (Indian) ordinance which was administrated by the British throughout their governance in the country. The estate management did not change the system of tasks and work carried out by the workers in the estates. The management also protected the stipulated wage income and other fringe benefits which were specified in the labour ordinance. Apart from this, the estate management had also overseen the distribution of line rooms for the workers. Up to now, around 43,000 houses have been converted into decent houses, but still around 160,000 families continue to live in the line rooms. The workers are not entitled to engage in any other agricultural

activities other than in the space allocated for home gardening activities in the estate. The estate sector is not fully integrated with the public administrative system that has been in existence for the rural and urban communities in the country. Hence, the decentralized budget allocated to the members of parliament to spend in their respective electorates on development projects did not reach sufficiently to the estate workers. Thus, the estate workers are excluded from the benefits of the decentralized budget. The same situation can be observed in the provincial councils and the local government body known as Pradeshiya Sabhas in the country where their members are elected by the estate community, but denied of providing services based on certain legal grounds. These hurdles came to an end only in 2018 with an amendment to the Pradheshiya Sabha Act of 1987. It should be noted that the estate workers elected members for Pradeshiya Sabhas, but until now the office of the Divisional Secretariat Divisions have not been established to provide the secretariat services to the estate workers.

It is interesting to observe that the formation of the Ministry of Plantation Industry was to create the impression that its mandate was to serve the plantation

industry in the country. But, paradoxically the ministry is providing its services to the tea smallholdings and other plantation crops such as coconut, rubber, oil palm, cashew, sugarcane and forestry. In many ways, the ministry is not engaged with the large-scale tea plantations managed by the RPCs in the country.

Rapid changes in extent of tea and production and their impact on the tea industry

According to the information provided in the Statistical Information on Plantation Crops (SIPC) of 2018, the RPCs controlled about 369 estates while the number of estates owned by the JEDB and SLSPC were 17 and 13 respectively. The total extent of tea cultivation in the country was 200,001 hectares in 2018. This includes the extent of tea managed by the RPCs (77,553 hectares), the State Plantation of Elkaduwa plantation Ltd (1,206 hectares), Tea Research Institute (143 hectares), JEDB (3,015 hectares), SLSPC (3,982) and tea smallholdings (122,448 hectares). Accordingly, only 38.77 percent of the total extent of tea plantations come under the purview of the RPCs & State Plantations, whereas, the extent of tea land belonging to tea smallholdings is 61.23 percent which is almost 1 ½ times the extent of large-scale tea estates managed by the RPCs in the country. Table 1 illustrates the average data for five years indicating the extent of tea land in RPCs & SPs and tea smallholdings from 1991 to 2020 in the country

Table 1: Extent of Tea Land in Sri Lanka -1991 to 2020 (in hectares)

Years	RPCs & SPs	Tea smallholdings	Total
1991/95	106,147	63,693	200,829
1996/00	99,984	83,683	185,686
2001/05	96,105	86,689	182,794
2006/10	92,873	118,751	211,622
2011/15	82,890	120,971	204,053
2016/18*	78,336	122,296	200,632
Changes between 1991 – 2018	–27,811	+ 86,414	-197

Source: Compiled from Statistical information on plantation crops (1998, 2008, 2011 and 2020), Ministry of Plantation Industry, Colombo

Note: It is only a three-year average. The relevant data for 2019 and 2020 is not available in the Statistical Information on Plantation Crops published in 2020.

According to Table 1, between 1991 and 1995, the extent of large-scale tea estates managed by the RPCs is considerably high when compared to the extent managed by tea smallholdings. However, during the last three decades, the extent of large scale tea land managed by the RPCs has continuously reduced resulting in a loss of 27,811 hectares. The tea smallholdings obtained additional extents of tea land during this period. As per the Table above, the tea smallholdings increased their extent of tea land with an additional 86,414 hectares within three decades. Figure 1 illustrates the annual trend in the extent of tea land between large-scale tea estates managed by the RPCs and the tea smallholdings during the last three decades from 1991 in Sri Lanka.
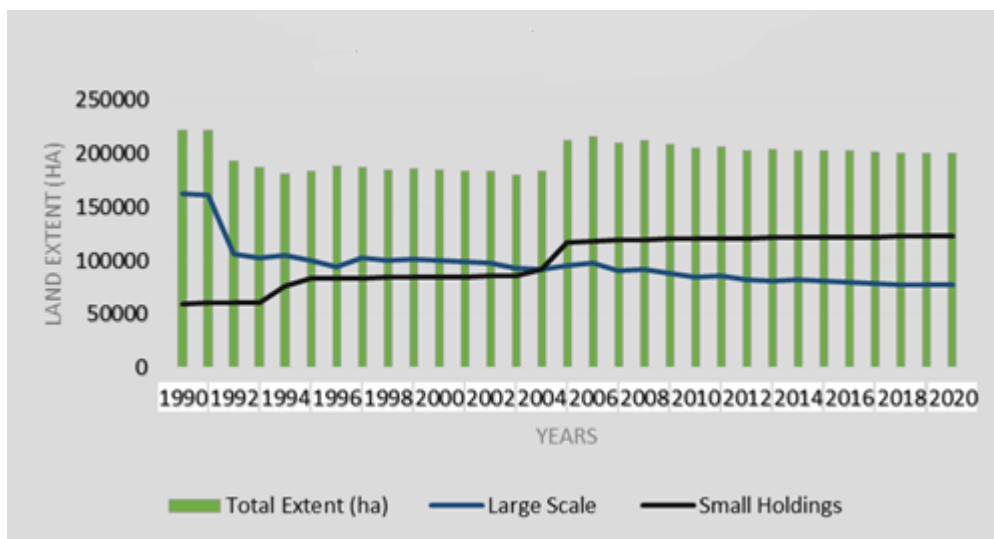

Figure 1: Extent of Large-Scale and Tea Smallholding Sectors in Sri Lanka -1990 to 2021 (in Hectares)

Source: Compiled from Statistical Information on Plantation Crops (1998, 2008, 2011 and 2020), Ministry of Plantation Industry, Colombo

Figure 1 illustrates the trend in the extent of tea land held by both the tea sectors in the country. The extent of land held by large scale tea plantations managed by the RPCs has steadily declined until 2004, whereas, conversely, the extent of land held by tea smallholdings has had a continuous upward trajectory. Thus, it is clear that land usage for tea cultivation by the RPCs and SPs is on the decline. Table 1 also indicates a reduction of 27,811 hectares of tea cultivation land managed by RPCs during the last three decades since 1991. According to the SIPC of 2018, the extent of ownership of tea land in the estate sector has sharply declined from 2007 onwards due to various factors. This has declined at an average rate of 1,020 hectares per annum up to 2018.

It is interesting to note that, although the RPCs and the State Plantations managed an extent of 78,336 hectares i.e. 38.77 percent of the tea cultivation, the matured tea land owned by them was 74,336 hectares as of 2018. Of the extent of land with matured tea, 40,423 hectares or 54.37 percent consists of High Yielding Varieties (HYV). Whereas, the extent of tea land with seedlings consists of 39,680 hectares or 45. 63 percent of the total tea land. The proportion of tea land with seedlings is much higher (61percent) in State Plantations compared to the RPCs (SIPC: 2020). The seedling tea bushes in the country are identified as old tea bushes with a considerably low level of productivity when compared to HYV. Many of these seedling varieties were planted during the British period.

As far as tea production is concerned, a total of 278.49 mn kgs of tea was produced in Sri Lanka in 2020 which is around 21 mn kgs less than the production in 2019. Table 2 shows the average data for tea produced by the RPCs, SPs and tea smallholdings during the five-year period from 1991 to 2020.

Table 2: Production of Tea in Sri Lanka 1991 to 2020 (in mn kgs.)

Year	RPCs & SPs	Tea Smallholdings	Total
1991/95	103.6	124.2	227.8
1996/00	115.2	179.7	294.9
2001/05	105.5	203.4	308.9
2006/10	98.3	212.9	311.3
2011/15	93.0	239.1	332.1
2016/20*	75.1	226.0	301.3

Source: Compiled from Statistical Information on Plantation Crops, (1998, 2008, 2011 and 2020), Ministry of Plantation Industry, Colombo.

Note: It is only a three-year average. The relevant data for 2019 and 2020 are not available in the Statistical information on plantation crops published in 2020

Source: Compiled from Statistical Information on Plantation Crops, (1998, 2008, 2011 and 2020), Ministry of Plantation Industry, Colombo.

Note: It is only a three-year average. The relevant data for 2019 and 2020 are not available in the Statistical information on plantation crops published in 2020

As per table 2, total tea production has increased by about 74 mn kgs during the last thirty years; from 227.8 mn kgs during 1991/95 to 301.3 mn kgs in 2016/20. The increase was mainly due to the contribution of tea smallholdings. The data in the table shows the trajectory of tea production between RPCs & SPs and the tea smallholdings from the commencement of the privatization of the tea sector in the country. The initial contribution from RPCs & SPs was high with a production of 103.6 mn kgs of tea; 45.37 percent of the total average tea production during 1991/95. Since then, this figure has steadily declined to a total average production of 75.1 mn kgs or 24.92 percent of the total tea produced during the period 2016/20. Figure 2 illustrates the annual trend in tea production of both the RPCs & SPs from 1990 to 2020; the production gap between these two sectors since 1992, from the time of privatization and the contribution towards tea production from tea smallholdings has seen a constant upward movement for last thirty years since 1990s.
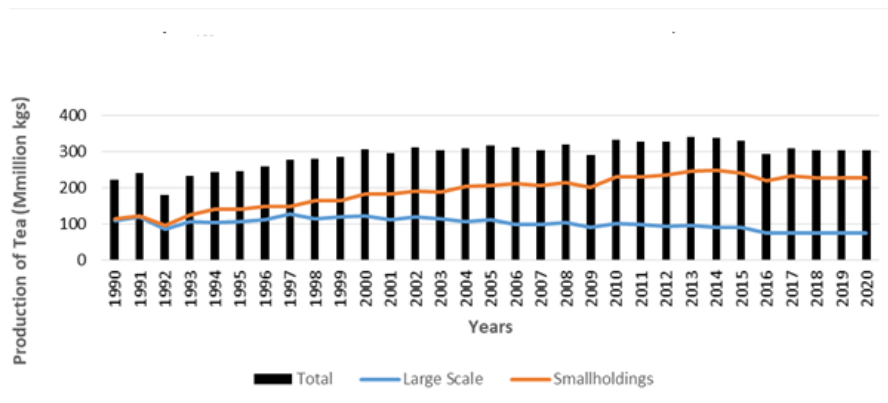
Figure 2: Tea Production in Sri Lanka 1990-2020 (in mn kgs)

*Source: Compiled from Statistical Information on Plantation Crops (1998, 2008, 2011 and 2020),
Ministry of Plantation Industry, Colombo.*

CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT PATTERN AND INCOME OF THE WORKERS IN THE PLANTATIONS

Tea plantation is the most labour intensive industry in Sri Lanka with the sector employing at the rate of 3 persons per hectare while the sector requires the supply of labour throughout the year (Silva, 1982, Sinnathamby & Wickramasekara, 1984; Kumarihamy and Songs, 2018). The nature of work needs the engagement of both the male and female labour force. Plucking of tea leaves is an important activity which is a specialized job carried out by the female workforce. The male workers perform routine work and other periodic jobs as required in the estates. The routine work consists of the maintenance of tea bushes, tea processing in the factory, weeding and cleaning the boundary. The periodic work includes the application of fertilizer, spraying pesticides, pruning, uprooting and planting tea bushes. The tasks provided as daily work are decided mainly by the estate management with instructions specified to the estate workers thorough other supervisory level staff in the estate. The workers are expected to follow the work norms as set out in the Estate Labour (Indian) Ordinance in the country (Sinnathamby & Wickramasekara, 1984). The trade unions intervene when there are any grievances between the employers and employees in the plantation sector.

However, the nature of work of the plantation workers has gradually changed on a par with the administrative changes that have taken place in the plantation sector. The management of RPCs and SPs have gradually reduced the provisions for the maintenance of tea bushes. For example, RPCs & SPs had applied 200,000 MT of fertilizer in 2000 which was reduced to 131,000 MT and 121,990 MT in 2008 and 2016 respectively. As far as replanting is concerned, the RPCs & SPs had replanted 800 hectares with HYV in 2000, but this went down to 316 hectares in 2016, whereas during the same period the extent of replanting by the tea smallholdings was three times higher than the figures of RPCs &SPs. As mentioned above, the RPCs & SPs had also taken some other measures to obtain the maximum benefit from the production of tea. As such, many tea factories closed down and they gradually reduced the number of male workers they employed for the maintenance of tea bushes and expected them to engage in tea plucking which has been traditionally carried out by the female workers in the estates. Apart from this, the RPCs & SPs were confined to plucking tea leaves from the HYV. Eventually, the estate management pushed out the male workers from the estate jobs and indirectly encouraged the registered workers to submit applications for the pre-retirement scheme. Table 3 indicates the gradual drop of registered tea workers in the country from 1990 to 2020.

Table 3: Changes in workforce in the tea plantations in Sri Lanka -In every five years from 1992 - 2018

Year	Number of Workers			Percentage of Frequency Distribution
	Registered	Declined from estate work	Cumulative Frequency Distribution	
1992	408,784			
1995	319,507	89,277		
2000	277,886	41,621	130,898	31.86
2005	246,463	31,423	162,321	39.70
2010	212,826	33,637	195,958	47.79
2015	161,557	51,265	247,223	60.53
2018	139,532	22,025	269,248*	65.93

* Cumulative figure of only three years
Source: Compiled from Statistical information on plantation crops,   (1998, 2008, 2011 and 2020), Ministry of Plantation Industry, Colombo.

Thus, the number of registered workers in the RPCs & SPs was 408,784 in 1992 which declined to 139,532 workers i.e. to 65.93 percent in 2018. The declining trend in the number of registered workers in the estate sector did not have a significant impact on the strength of the population living in the estates. For example, the distribution of population living in the estate sector was 901,6003 in 2019. Thus, it clearly demonstrates that though the number of registered estate workers had declined, most of their families continued to live on the estates. It should be also noted that the Estate Labour (Indian) Ordinance has provisions that allow the estate workers to continue living on the estates until their demise even after the termination of their jobs. Besides, a considerable number of workers were given their termination either through the pre-retirement scheme or any other means while they subsequently joined the same estate as casual or temporary workers. These casual and temporary workers are not entitled to obtain any provisions other than being able to occupy the line rooms in the estates. Moreover, they are also not entitled to receive any additional allowances which are added to the daily wage and hence are entitled to receive only the minimum wage for their work. This type of casual or temporary workers could be considered as free labour and they conveniently operate based on their needs.

The tendency indicating the unwillingness of youth in the estates in joining their parental jobs was also observed among the sample households in the estates. A considerable number of youth with some education leave to urban areas especially to Colombo for jobs and subsequently if they fail to settle down after a while, they revert to the estates and remain as unemployed persons even though there are jobs available on the estates that require manual labour. Though some of the children of the estate workers are qualified with secondary level education, they have only limited opportunities to join the staff grade jobs available in the estates. The unemployed persons on the estates were generally educated youth. When asked about their opinion about joining estate work, they showed unwillingness to pursue parental jobs. They also felt that it was not necessary to work in their parental jobs since there was sufficient income from several family members who were working. This pattern has been observed in other tea growing

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[3] Economic and statistics of Sri Lanka – 2019, Central bank of Sri Lanka, Table 3.1 p14.

countries as well (Kumarihamy and Songs, 2018).

As far as the estate workers are concerned, the wage is their major income source and initially, wages were decided based on the Wage Board Ordinance of No 27 of 1941. Accordingly, the determination of wage rates for estate workers was decided at the wage board which was embodied by the representatives from the employer, employee and the government. Nevertheless, this was reformed at the time of privatization by introducing the CA in 1992 which was embodied only by the representatives from the employer and employee. The representatives of the CA were supposed to meet on alternative years to make decisions mainly on wage revisions. The members of the CA had met on around ten occasions since its inception and decided the wage for the workers. As such, the daily wage rates agreed during the CA meetings from 1994 to 2021 are as follows:

Table 4. Daily Wage Decided at the CA -1994 to 2021

Years	Basic Wage (in Rupees)	Basic Wage + attendance intensive + PSS (in Rupees)
1994		83
1998		95
2001	101	116
2004	135	185
2007	200	290
2009	285	405
2011	380	515
2013	480	620
2016	500	720
2021	1000	1000*

Source: Compiled based on the field study
Note: Basic wage of Rs.900 from RPC and Rs.100 from the government budgetary allowance.

As shown in Table 4, the daily wage has increased from Rs. 83 in 1994 to Rs. 1000 in 2021. This is an increase of slightly over 12 times during the 27 years since 1994. Of course, it is an increase from a two-digit figure to a four-digit figure in 2021. The estate management used to provoke workers by talking about these trends in their estate's public forums. However, the impact from the upward trend on the worker's purchasing power and how it has reduced the income disparities between the rural and estate sector in the country is questionable. The reports of the Consumer Finance and Social Economic Survey - 2003/04 (CFS) and the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIE) constantly provide figures on the income distribution of the Urban, Rural and Estate sector in the country. As reported in the CFS 2003/04, the monthly income in the Urban sector was Rs.17,368 while the corresponding figures for the rural and estate sectors were Rs.10,060 and Rs.4,899 respectively. The figures in the HIE 2016 report indicate that the mean income in the Urban sector was Rs.22,297 while in the rural sector it was Rs.15,508. However, the estate sector income was Rs. 8, 666; almost half of the rural sector income. Thus, it is clear that

though the estate management has been benevolent in wage increases to the workers in the estate sector, worker income is not on par with their counterparts in the rural sector of the country. Moreover, income is the primary tool to measure the incidence of poverty in the country. Hence, it is also imperative to perceive the level of poverty among estate workers by taking their income in to consideration. According to the survey carried out by the Census Department in 2016, the percentage of people living in poverty was 1.3 percent in the Urban sector while in the Rural sector it was 3.3 percent. Yet, in the Estate sector, it was as high as 6.8 percent. Apparently, the above facts indicate that the wage increase for estate workers during the last 27 years did not uplift their level of income or reduce the prevalence of poverty of these workers.

It is interesting to note the statement made towards the end of the wage negotiation in 2009. Accordingly, the RPCs and their representatives had repeatedly stressed that there was no requirement to further revise wages since workers earned around Rs.10,000 per month and they went on to state that the poverty level in the estate sector had declined on a par with the

national average. Ostensibly, the RPC constantly made contradictory statements during the wage negotiations and went on to state that 'higher wages lead to higher labour cost ultimately making the estate a loss making businesses'. This allegation that has been constantly reported by the RPC is challengeable. A well known scholar, Janaka Ratnasiri in his recent publication on the tea sector provided substantial evidence about the profit margin of the RPC. According to him, there are about 325 tea exporters and originally, only the designated companies exported tea. But later, the factories as well as RPCs have engaged in tea exports considering the high profit margin. According to the Central Bank's Annual Report (2019), the average auction price of tea was Rs./kg 546.67, while the average export price was LKR/kg 822.25, leaving a margin of Rs./kg 275.58. The total tea (made tea) production in 2019 was 300.13 Mkg, while the quantity exported was 292.65 Mkg. Thus, the exporters had made a gross profit of Rs. 80.65 Billion in 2019. His complete article can be accessed here https://island.lk/proposed-wage-increase-for-tea-plantation-workers/ (4.9.2021). Apart from this, the tea workers also come out with some calculation of the production. As such, 4 kilograms of made tea could be made out of

17 kilograms of green leaves (existing norm for daily wage) and the market price of one kilogram of tea is around Rs.600. Thus, a worker contribution (4 x Rs.600) is around Rs.2,400 per day and demanding only Rs.1000 which is only 41 percent of the production per day is not unreasonable.

Apart from wage increments, the arguments put forward by the RPC on the cost of production are illogical and to some certain extent misleading about the country's tea sector. Apparently, the calculation of cost of production (COP) should be an independent study. If it is carried out by the producer, the end result will be biased towards the interested parties in the business. Hence, it was very difficult to trace an independent study that has been conducted thus far to calculate the COP of tea in the country. The latest figures on COP of tea were indicated in the Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) publication on the analysis of 'Sri Lanka Living Wage: Estate Sector (TEA)' published in 2017. As per this study, the labour cost during the 2014/15 period was 63 percent (per kilo of made tea) of the COP of tea. The IPS had used figures in relation to the cost of labour in the COP for this study from a publication of Census and Statistics Department, citing a website link. However, the link is undated and currently inactive so

that the credibility of the analysis made from information in this undated and inactive link is questionable. Furthermore, the study also made one more observation in relation to the labour cost of the COP of tea in comparison to other major tea producing countries; India, Kenya, Bangladesh and Vietnam, and went on to state that the relative labour cost of tea production is the highest in Sri Lanka. Hence, the validity of the statements in this context is also problematic. In addition to this, the Statistical Information on Plantation Crops published by the Ministry of Plantation Industry (SIPC) also provides figures on the total COP of tea, but it has not given a breakdown of labour cost. Therefore, the information provided by these publications cannot be used for any analysis of labor cost in COP of tea in the country. According to the SIPC, the per kilogram cost of production of made tea has rapidly increased from 2005 to 2015 due to the cost of green leaf, transportation cost for green leaf, power, factory labour, packaging materials, machinery maintenance etc. The above factors had negatively affected the cost of production of the tea industry during that period. However, there was a decrease in COP by 3 percent in 2015 -since then, again COP had gradually increased until

2018. This indicates that there is no valid information available in public domain in relation to COP so that some of the arguments over COP are not valid and reliable and can also be challenged.

CONCLUSION

The article aimed to investigate changes, issues and transitions in the plantation industry in Sri Lanka and it covered three major areas in relation to changes taking place in the tea industry. They are: persistent changes in the plantation system and their implications, rapid changes in extent of tea and production and their impact on the tea industry and the changes in employment pattern and income of the workers in the plantations. Thus it is clear from the foregoing discussion that the share of the large-scale estate sector has gradually declined over time while the contribution of the tea smallholdings sector towards tea production in the country has drastically increased. As per this article, there have been many reasons for the declining trend of RPCs & SPs tea estates in the country – they are largely institutional, managerial, labour, productivity, wages, prices, poor maintenance of tea plantations, investments, government policy towards tea industry, global competition, tea consumptions etc. The article also shows that the

decreasing trend of extent of tea, increase of abandoned marginal tea lands, poor replanting, unsatisfactory wage, lack of labour dignity, increasing labour migration all appear to influence this pattern further. A similar kind of pattern can be observed in Indian tea industry as well. The article further shows the failures of successive governments' policy measures in sustaining the tea sector. The article informs the policy makers as well as RPCs and SPs over the significant policy, institutional and governance failures in Sri Lanka and the necessity to develop policy options in the future to sustain the age-old large scale tea plantations which made Sri Lanka proud internationally in the name of well known "Ceylon Tea". Given the current severe economic crisis of the country and pandemic-ushered economic hardships, there is an urgent need to revamp, protect and foster the large scale tea industry in Sri Lanka to increase external earnings. There remain adequate potentials to expedite the productivity of the tea industry by addressing fundamental issues that have emerged in the recent past. The article may have some limitations as it has used largely secondary sources, and therefore, future research on the changes in the tea industry should focus more on empirical evidence so that it will help validate the previous

studies and will show the real picture of the current status of the industry.

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INVESTIGATING THE POTENTIAL FOR RAINWATER HARVESTING AND ITS USE AS SAFE POTABLE WATER IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the potential of promoting rainwater as a source of safe potable water in the North Central Province (NCP) of Sri Lanka. Study location is the North Central Province (NCP) of Sri Lanka, namely Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Districts. Madawachchiya and Kabithigollawa were selected from Anuradhapura District while Madirigiriya and Dimbulagala from the Polonnaruwa District as the sampling Divisional Secretariat (DS) areas. Sample covered all the selected GN divisions in relevant DSs. Both primary and secondary sources were used for data collection. Primary data was collected mainly through a structured questionnaire taken from a sample of 300 households. The questionnaire survey focused on the general socio-economic status of households, water sources used for domestic purposes, water related issues and the impact of the drought on livelihood activities. The quality of drinking water was tested using 100 water samples. Quality parameters, such as important chemical, physical and biological parameters of drinking water from all sources in the entire sampling area, including rainwater tanks and water from RO plants and wewas were tested.

According to the survey data, 87% of people had a positive impression of drinking rainwater. Most of the people drink rainwater without any purification practices. According to the results, harvested rainwater water quality was found to be better than the samples tested from well water. Rainwater was found to have been not biologically contaminated to the extent of more than 90% and 10% biological contaminated, due to bad maintenance of tanks, and mixed rainwater in the tank with surface water, when the tank gets empty. People try to use it as a storage tank. Chemical and physical parameters in rainwater tanks were within the safe range for drinking purposes, under the maximum tolerant level according to the standards (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6). Water obtained from rainwater was

in good quality and low cost and considered a suitable and reliable water source for consumption for CKDu patients. Therefore, to collect rainwater during the rainy season is very important, and recommended as a reliable water source for NCP with special reference to climate change impacts and social benefits.

Key words: *Rainwater, water quality, reliable water source, CKDu, water consumption*

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INTRODUCTION

The Annual Health Bulletin (2015) of the Ministry of Health, reported that the water quality for drinking purposes in the North Central Province (NCP) was not within the accepted standard level. There are lots of factors that affect the quality of water. Heavy use of agrochemicals and the geological formation of the area are the main factors affecting the water quality of the study area (Jayasinghe, 2011).

Rainfall analysis by the Meteorological Department for Polonnaruwa from 1951 to 2010 presented that the rainfall during the Maha season (second inter-monsoon and North-East monsoon) had reduced by 230 mm over a period of 55 years at the rate of 4 mm/year. The population and the demand for water have increased over that period. Likewise, the rainfall during Yala season (first inter-monsoon and South-West monsoon) has also decreased according to the Meteorological Department data. The low rainfall resulted in a drastic drop in water levels in hydro catchments and reservoirs, with severe disruption to hydropower generation, domestic water supply and agriculture. Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa districts were the worst affected by the drought. (De Silva, 2015).

Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology (CKDu) which is the most threatening non communicable disease in the agricultural districts, mainly including North Central Province (Wanigasooriya, 2012). The duration that a person survived after being diagnosed of CKDu depends on how early the disease is identified and on how well the treatment is received and quality of life is maintained as drinking good quality water (Jayasinghe, 2011). It is impossible to supply quality pipe born drinking water in the short run without a high financial cost in terms of capital and maintenance expenses to the government.

As a result, rain water harvesting for drinking purposes which is a long introduced strategy for the easy access of safe quality water seems to be the best option. However, there are misconceptions still prevailing over rain water consumption. This has resulted from a lack of awareness among communities although the rain water harvesting has become an important theme in the international Millennium Development Goals as well. Sri Lanka has used rainwater for both

domestic and agricultural use for many centuries (Kandasamy et al., 2014). Rain water harvesting should be re-encouraged and should be facilitated as a short term measure for CKDu affected areas in Sri Lanka (De Silva, 2014). Research studies have shown that the rainwater harvesting as an adaptation measure for the impact of climate change on water resources in Dry Zone and Central Hills of Sri Lanka (De Silva, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The two study locations were Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Districts in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. In the first stage, Madawachchiya and Kabithigollawa were selected from Anuradapura District and Madirigiriya and Dibulagala were selected from the Polonnaruwa District. Study locations were selected based on the experiences of preliminary surveys, considering the water shortage and the water sources used by the communities.

Respondents were selected from households, in proportion to the number of households in the villages who are mostly affected by the lack or absence of safe drinking water. Multistage sampling technique was used to derive the study sample.

In the first place of the sample selection, two of the most affected DS divisions in terms of scarcity of safe drinking water, were selected from each of the two study districts. Next, two of the most affected villages of each of those four DS divisions, were selected to draw the sample of 300 households which would represent each village, in proportion to the number of households it consists of.

Data and information were collected both through primary and secondary sources. A structured questionnaire was employed to extract the required primary data from a sample of 300 households in the study area, which was the North Central Province.

Focus group discussions were also used to collect primary data from officers of the rainwater harvesting forum, officers of the presidential task force on CKDu prevention, divisional medical officers, officers of the environmental authority, district office and village level officers- such as Grama Niladari and PHI officer of the relevant area, and the members of the farmer organizations in the relevant area. Secondary data was collected from relevant sources and authorities.

Water quality parameters

(important chemical, physical and biological parameters) of rain water tanks, Reverse Osmosis (RO) plants, filter water, well water, and water sellers of relevant areas were identified using water quality testing. Sampling was done covering all the GN divisions (Yakawewa, Thiththagonnewa, Thammennaelawaka, Madawachchiya, Meegaswewa, Kumudupura, Dalukane and Kajuwatta) in the relevant districts. Sampling was done using the standard water sampling methods.

Quality parameters of the water sample were determined at the National Water Supply and Drainage Board labs in Anuradhapura (Regional Laboratory Anuradhapura) and Polonnaruwa (Regional Laboratory Gallella) districts and Agricultural Plantation Engineering Laboratory of the Open University of Sri Lanka, according to the SLS 614: 2013.

This standard was approved by the Sectoral Committee on Agricultural and food products and was authorized for adoption and publication as a Sri Lanka Standards Institution on 2013-08-28.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- **Water sources used in the study area**

The majority of the people in Madawachchiya and Madirigiriya DS divisions used well water as their drinking water source (Table 1 and 2). Similarly, people in both Kabithigollewa and Dimbulagala DS divisions, used well water as their main drinking water source. The Madirigiriya DS division RO plant was the main drinking water source, and then the well water. According to Table 1, in Madawachchiya DS, 69% were suffering from CKDu and it may be due to the use of unreliable water sources for drinking (surface water and tube well water). Only 50% were using reliable water sources such as RO water, filtered water or spring water.

Table 1: Water sources used in the Anuradhapura study area, for drinking purposes

Drinking Water Source	Anuradhapura			
	Madawachchiya		Kabithigollewa	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Well	29	38.7%	53	57.6%
Tube well	6	8.1%	9	9.8%
Spring	5	6.7%	25	27.2%
Tap water	1	1.3%	0	0.00%
Filters	26	34.7%	1	1.1%
RO plant	7	9.3%	3	3.3%
Both wells and streams	0	0.0%	1	1.1%
Both filter and RO plant	1	1.33%	0	0.00%
Total	75	100.00%	92	100.00%

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)

Table 2: Water sources used in the Polonnaruwa study area, for drinking purposes

Drinking Water Source	Polonnaruwa			
	Madirigiriya		Dibulagala	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Well	24	31.6%	50	64.1%
Tube well	1	1.3%	3	3.9%
Spring	12	15.8%	2	2.6%
Tap water	0	0.00%	9	11.5%
Filters	12	15.8%	11	14.1%
RO plant	27	35.5%	1	1.3%
Both wells and streams	0	0.0%	1	1.3%
Both filter and RO plant	0	0.00%	1	1.28%
Total	76	100.00%	78	100.00%

Source: HARTI survey data, 2018

- ## Rainwater harvesting and its usage

Figure 1 and 2 indicated the water usage in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa districts. Rainwater harvesting (RWH) systems were constructed primarily to meet water security at household level by providing safe water. The harvested rainwater is used for drinking needs with or without treatment. However, people in the study area, use the RWH systems for various purposes including drinking, sanitation, cooking, washing, bathing, gardening and other household needs. The findings indicate that 62% of the rainwater harvesting

tanks are being used either throughout the year or during the rainy period.

However, about 33% from the total sample had been fully abandoned at the time of the survey. And another 5% of the tanks from the total sample are not used to harvest rainwater but used as a storage tank to store water from other sources. Among the people who have RWH tanks, percentage of rainwater users for drinking purpose were higher in Polonnaruwa district than in Anuradhapura district (Table 3).
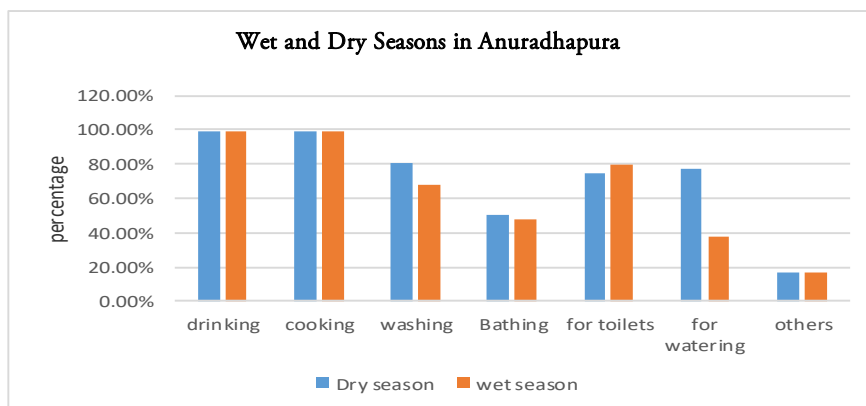
Figure 1: Harvested Rainwater Usage in Anuradhapura in 2018

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)
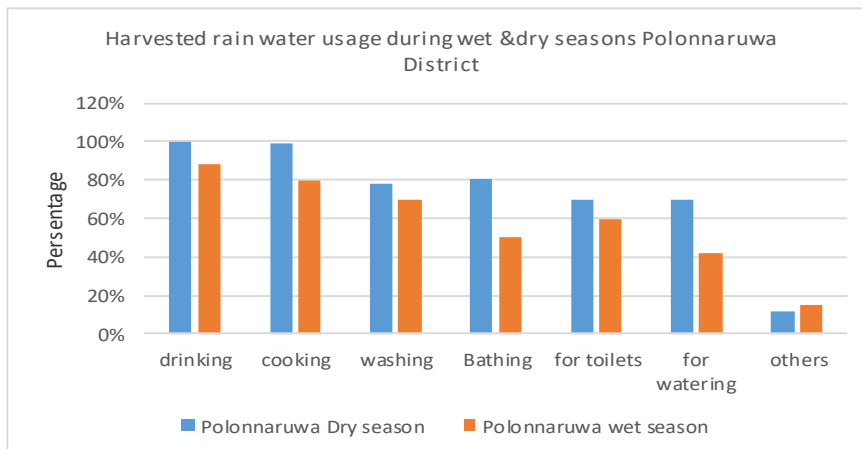
Figure 2: Harvested Rainwater Usage in Polonnaruwa in 2018

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)

Table 3: Rain Water Tank Usage in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Districts

Use rainwater for drinking purpose	District			
	Anuradhapura		Polonnaruwa	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	96	72.2%	65	83.3%
No	37	27.8%	13	16.7%
Total	133	100.0%	78	100.0%

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)

- **Duration of Using the Rainwater Tanks**

According to the survey data (Figure 3), nearly 28% of the consumers in Anuradhapura and 64% in Polonnaruwa can use their 5000 liters rainwater tank for about 4-6 months. If they fill the tank once, 52% use it for 10-12 months in Anuradhapura and 12% in Polonnaruwa. This may be due to the awareness among the community.

According to the survey data in Anuradhapura, there were more rainwater tanks and also more training programs about rainwater harvesting and its usage.

According to the observation, 80% of the rainwater tank owners said they could fill the 5000L tank twice a year, 14% can fill only once a year and 5% can fill it, thrice a year (HARTI survey data, 2018).

Percentage(%)	<3 months	4- 6 months	7- 9 months	10- 12 months	13- 15 months
Anuradhapura(%)	5.26	27.82	11.28	51.88	0.75
Polonnaruwa(%)	10.26	64.1	14.1	11.54	0
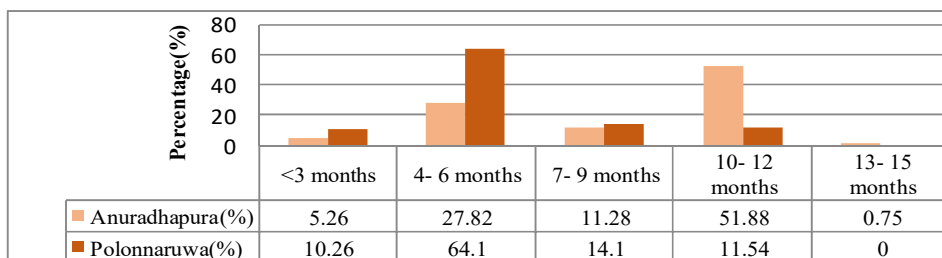
Figure 3: *Duration of Using the Rainwater Tanks*

(Source: *HARTI survey data, 2018)*

• **Reason for Adapting to a Rainwater Tank**

Some people have to travel a long distance to bring water, they have to devote a lot of time and money on this. If they had a rainwater tank at their premises, it would be an advantage for them. They can reduce transportation costs and save time. They could then use that time for leisure and other activities.

The major factors for selecting the rainwater tanks were availability of rainwater for drinking and the rainwater tank at home, non reliability of existing water sources to have enough water throughout the year as groundwater is contaminated in the area, and kidney disease.
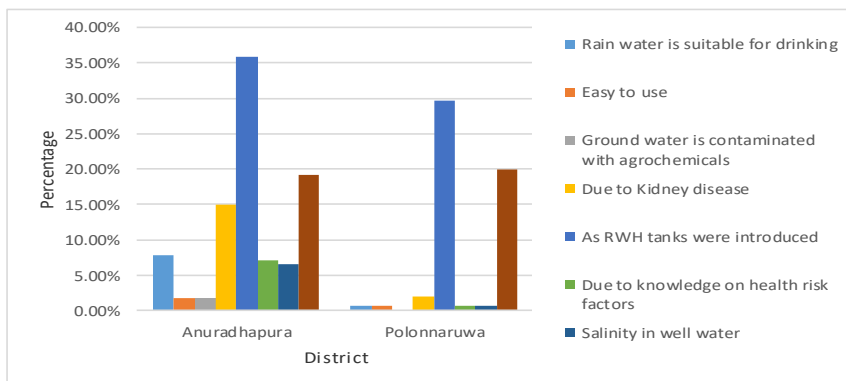
Figure 4: Reason for Adapting to a Rainwater Tank

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018).

- **Monthly Expenditure to buy water in the study Area**

According to the districts and monthly expense cross-tabulation, it was found that 75% of the families in Polonnaruwa district spend from Rs 500 to Rs 2000 per month to buy water.

Figure 5 illustrates that 90% of the total population in Anuradhapura have have an income level of over Rs 15,000. When we consider the Rs 15,000 as the minimum level of income, they have to spend 13.3% of their earnings to buy water, which is a considerable expense.

From the population, 75% from Polonnaruwa have to spend Rs 500 to Rs 2000 to buy water due to the lack of rain water harvesting tanks in Polonnaruwa compared with Anuradhapura District. In Anuradhapura, 64.3% have to spend up to Rs 2000 to buy water.
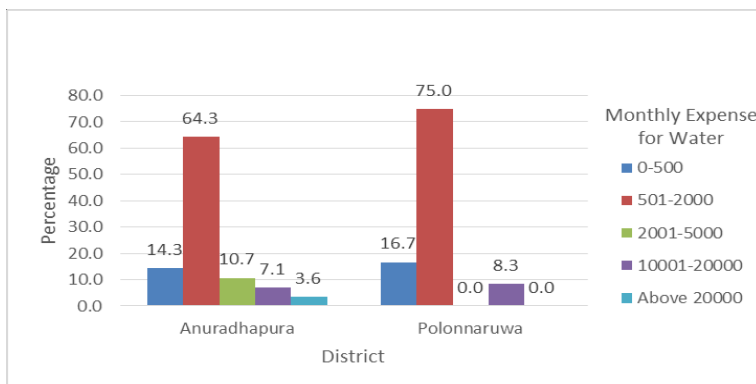
Figure 5: Monthly Expenditure to Buy Water in the Sample Area

Source: HARTI survey data, 2018

- **Villager's Perception about the Drinking of Rainwater**

According to survey data, 87% of people had a positive impression of drinking rainwater. Most of the people drink rainwater without any purification practices. According to survey data, 85% of the people who do not have a rainwater tank, admitted rainwater is suitable for drinking and the desire to use a RWT (HARTI survey data, 2018).
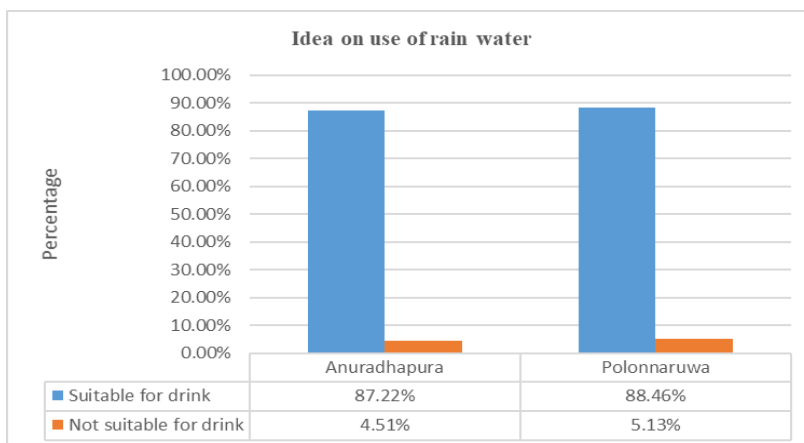
Figure 6: Perception about the Drinking of Rainwater

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)

Table 4: (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6) recommended maximum permissible limits.

Parameters(Physical/Chemical & Biological)	Maximum Requirement (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6)
Turbidity [NTU]	2
pH[At 25 ^{0}C +/- 0.05 ^{0}C]	6.5-8.5
Total Dissolves Solids [mg/l]	500
Total Hardness (as $CaCO_3$[mg/l]	250
Fluorides (as F) [mg/l]	0.1
Coliform Bacteria in 100ml	220
E.coli in100ml of Sample	70

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)

- **Total Dissolved Solid (TDS)**

Figure 8 indicates the TDS level in rainwater and other water sources in the study area. According to the distribution, some tube wells exceeded the reference level- Total Dissolves Solids Maximum Requirement (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6) is 500 mg/l (Table 4).

From the 22 well water samples, 17 samples were within the reference range. RO water is within the permissible TDS range. Out of the 46 rainwater tanks, only one sample exceeded the permissible level, it was due to bad maintenance of the tank.
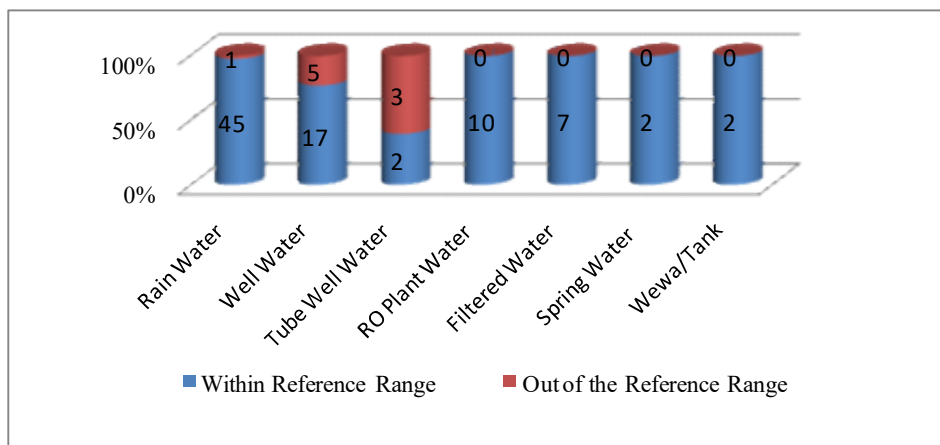
Figure 8: *Level of Total Dissolved Solid in Each Water Source*

(Source: *HARTI survey data, 2018).*

- **pH**

The mean pH value of rain water tanks (43 samples out of 46) in all the DS divisions, not exceeding the maximum requirement for drinking purpose, according to the SLS 614:2013 (UDC 663.6) standards as 6.5-8.5 pH [At 250 C +/- 0.050 0C] (Table 4).

The pH values are found to be within the recommended standards. A well designed and maintained RWH system can cause low health risks and high improvement in the health of humans (Ariyananda, 2003).

This physical property is permissible for drinking, as shown in the average pH of rainwater obtained was found to be slightly acidic in values in Kabithigollewa,

during the sampling period. But it was within the safe range. Out of 10, eight from tested RO plant water exceeded the standard levels pH [At 25 0C +/- 0.05 0C]. Maximum requirement (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6) 6.5- 8.5.
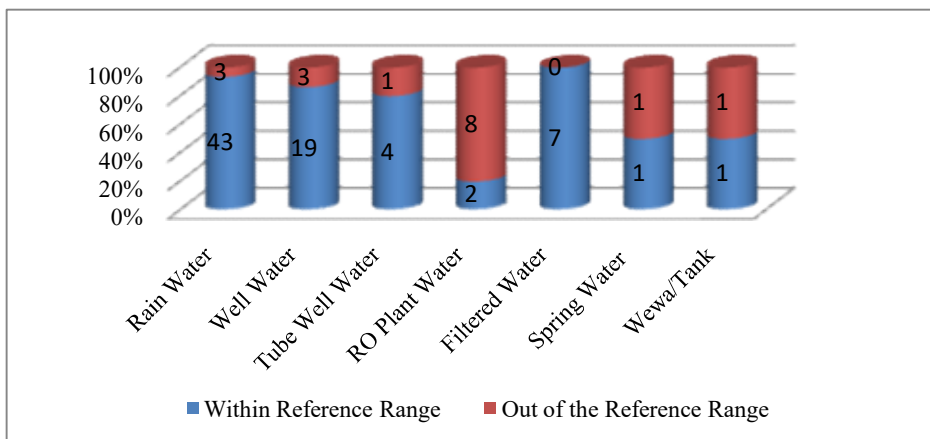
Figure 9. Level of pH in each water source

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018).

- **Total Hardness**

Recommended standards on the total hardness of drinking water had been maintained for all rainwater tanks except one (Figure 10).

Shallow well water (12 out of 22) and tube well water (2 out of 3) total hardness had exceeded the standards. Total Hardness (as CaCO3) in mg/l Maximum Requirement (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6) 250 (Table 4)
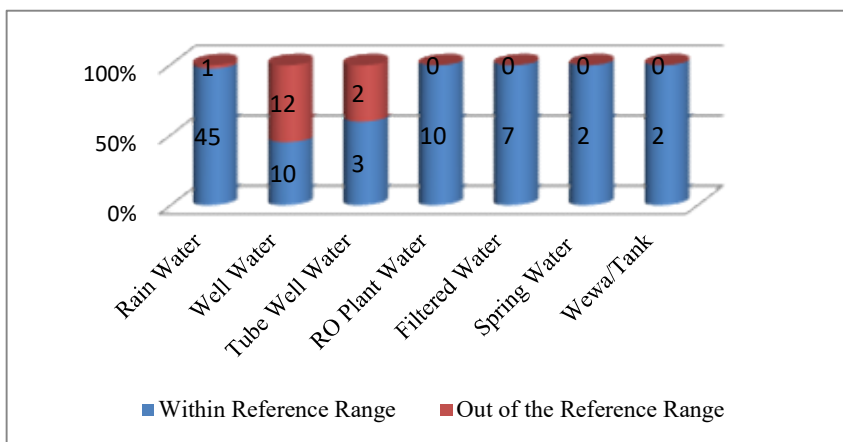
Figure 10: *Level of Hardness in each water source*

(Source: *HARTI survey data, 2018)*

- **Coliform Bacteria Count in water sources**

Overall, 80% of the tested rainwater tanks recorded without the coliform bacteria (Figure 11). The recommended total number of all types of coliform bacteria present in 100 ml sample at 370C is <10 for drinking water (well water).

Maximum Requirement (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6) Coliform Bacteria in 100ml is 220 (Table 4)
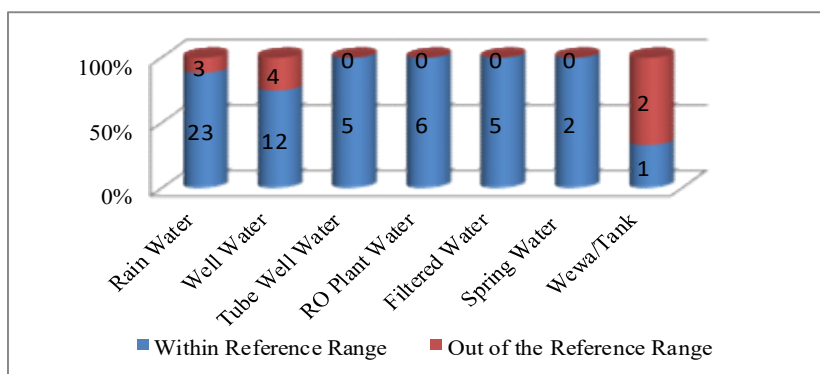
Figure 11: *Level of Coliform Bacteria Count in Each Water Source*
(Source: *HARTI survey data, 2018)*

- **E-Coli count in harvested rainwater in tanks**

Having a simple charcoal and gravel filter and first-flush systems reduce the contamination levels in the tanks markedly (Ariyabandu, 1999). E. Coli levels in the tanks receiving rainwater from G.I roof are lesser than from other (HARTI survey data, 2018), roofs due to the heating of the G. I roof which result in perishing of E. Coli in the roof (Vasudeva et al., 2001). E. Coli in 100ml of Sample Maximum Requirement is 70 (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6) (Table 4).
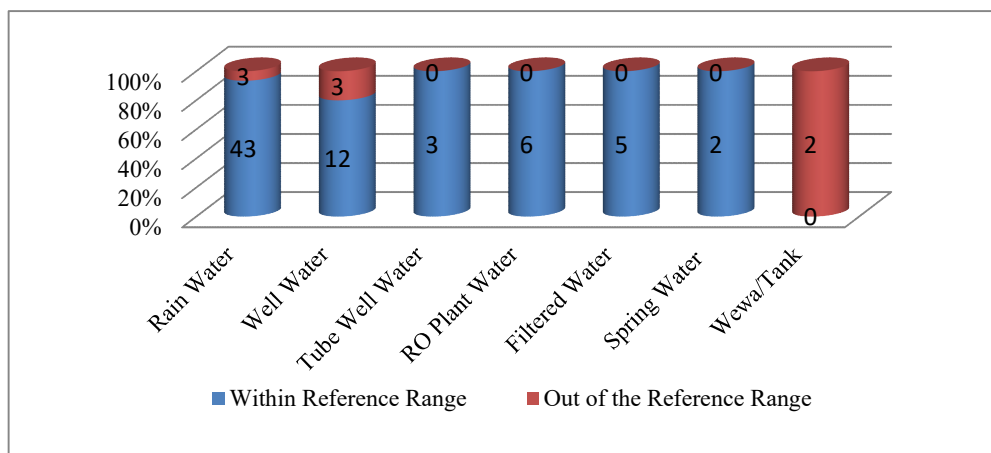
Figure 12: Level of E‑Coli Count in Harvested Rainwater

(Source: HARTI survey data, 2018)

CONCLUSIONS

According to the survey data, a total of 167 HH from Anuradhapura and 155 HH from Polonnaruwa, people have to face many problems when collecting water, for their drinking purposes. People in these areas have many water quality problems because the existing water source does not have enough water throughout the year, groundwater contamination problems in the area and the kidney disease of unknown etiology are the problems they have to face.

The rainwater tank owners used the tank for various purposes during rainy seasons as well as in

the dry seasons. There are no health issues recorded resultant on the drinking of rainwater when comparing the health issues between the users and non-rainwater users. A rainwater system, offers the people a lot of advantages. Rainwater harvesting is a feasible strategy to mitigate the increasing water crisis.

Nearly 10% of the water samples collected from water sellers were not in the safe range. But the people of the area have to spend money to buy this water.

According to the results, harvested rainwater water quality was found to be better than that of the water in the samples tested from shallow wells. Rainwater was found not to have been biologically contaminated to the extent of more than 90 percent. And 10% biological contamination was due to the improper maintenance of their tank and mixing rainwater with surface water, when the tank gets empty or gets used as a storage tank.

Chemical and physical parameters in rainwater tanks were within the safe range for drinking purposes, under the maximum tolerant level according to the standards (SLS 614:2013) (UDC 663.6).

When taking these facts into account rainwater harvesting is undoubtedly the most rational, cost-effective, socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable method of providing clean drinking water to widely scattered rural households in the CKDu affected in North Central province in the dry zone of Sri Lanka.

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PROGRAMME IN ENGLISH FOR LEGAL STUDIES – STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE NEW NORMAL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

English for Legal Studies (ELS) has been specifically designed for the LLB undergraduates of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Part II of ELS is prescribed with 15 face-to-face sessions per cycle. However, due to the present global scenario, day schools were conducted in the distance mode, using zoom technology. The current study examined the teachers', students' and observers' perspectives on the effectiveness of online lessons and assessment.

The total number of teachers (5) who conducted the online sessions, 349 students out of the total population of Part II (1077) and observations of the online sessions (5) created the sample. Data collected using a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and observation journal entries, were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

The findings from the interviews with the teachers revealed their positive perspectives towards online teaching with respect to convenience and effectiveness. However, the inability to enhance the competence of students on all four skills equally and to maintain interaction between students and teachers successfully, were pointed out.

The findings from the students' questionnaires revealed their satisfaction on online delivery, highlighting the benefit of having access to highly competent resource persons and maintaining uniformity in lessons delivered across the country. Furthermore, a majority found the experience of online assessment interesting despite having no prior experience. However, the need for inclusion of assessment in all four skills was emphasized.

The data collected through observations confirmed the perspectives of students and teachers.

The recommendations suggested by all samples included training on the use of technology in online lesson delivery, catering to learners through smaller groups and maintaining interest of learners by using audio visual learning resources.

Thus, the new normal experience of online English language teaching/learning can be made more effective by addressing the challenges and enhancing its benefits as recommended.

Key words: *English language teaching/learning, Face to face sessions, Online lessons, Online assessment*

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INTRODUCTION

English for Legal Studies (ELS) has been specifically designed for the LLB undergraduates of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Part II of ELS is prescribed with 15 face-to-face sessions per cycle. However, due to the present global scenario, day schools were conducted in the distance mode, using zoom technology. The current study examined the teachers', students' and observers' perspectives on the effectiveness of online lessons and assessment.

The total number of teachers (5) who conducted the online sessions, 349 students out of the total population of Part II (1077) and observations of the online sessions (5) created the sample. Data collected using a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and observation journal entries, were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

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The findings from the students' questionnaires revealed their satisfaction on online delivery, highlighting the benefit of having access to highly competent resource persons and maintaining uniformity in lessons delivered across the country. Furthermore, a majority found the experience of online assessment interesting despite having no prior experience. However, the need for inclusion of assessment in all four skills was emphasized.

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The recommendations suggested by all samples included training on the use of technology in online lesson delivery, catering to learners through smaller groups and maintaining interest of learners by using audio visual learning resources.

Thus, the new normal experience of online English language teaching/learning can be made more effective by addressing the challenges and enhancing its benefits as recommended.

English language teaching/ learning, Face to face sessions,

Online lessons, Online assessment

ELS is a programme offered by the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) which is specifically designed for LLB undergraduates who enroll with the Department of Legal Studies of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Since English is the medium of instruction for the LLB degree, completing the English for Legal Studies programme is a mandatory requirement for the LLB degree certificate. Part II of ELS is prescribed with 15 face-to-face sessions per cycle with two Continuous Assessment (CA) tests and a Final Examination held in person.

However, in line with the present global pandemic situation highlighting the need for digitally enhanced learning spaces, the on-site day schools were replaced with 10 sessions conducted in the distance mode using zoom technology, during the current academic year, and the CA tests were conducted entirely online within the potentials of the learning platform.

The transition to an online mode of delivery in the ELS programme served an emergency requirement. Therefore, neither the practitioners nor the policy makers had sufficient time to plan and design an ideal online course. Hence, it is important to understand the challenges faced by the students and the teachers, and their preferences with regard to the teaching/learning mode newly introduced, in order to develop it for future use. Thus, the current study examined the teachers', students' and observers' perspectives on the effectiveness of the online mode adopted in delivery of lessons and preparation for assessment.

As such, the objectives of the current study include:

1. Exploring the effectiveness of new normal learning experience of the students of ELS.

2. Discovering the experience of the practitioners while delivering sessions and preparing students for examinations online.

3. Verifying the findings through the views of the observers.

Based on these objectives, the current study addresses the following research questions:

1. Do the students prefer online sessions to face to face sessions?

2. What are the reasons for the students' preferences?

3. How effective could the online

mode be for ESP teaching?

4. How best can the online mode be used to prepare students for examinations?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Through the exploration of related literature, the findings of research on online delivery and evaluation, which throw light on the current research, are highlighted.

In a study exploring college students' perceptions on adoption, use and acceptance of online learning during COVID-19 by Aguilera-Hermida (2020), it was revealed that students experienced stress related to online learning and difficulties when completing schoolwork.

However, it has been proved that technology, if used effectively, allows students and teachers to mutually engage and collaborate (Bower, 2019; García Botero, Questier, Cincinnato, He, & Zhu, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2020). Further, a study based on technology acceptance model to gain insights into the user reactions to technology adopted for language learning (Alfadda and Mahdi, 2020), reveals a strong correlation between students' actual use of zoom and students' attitudes and behavioural

intentions. The study also points to a positive correlation between students' computer self-efficacy and experience.

The importance of the satisfaction among teachers on the experience of online delivery is a widely discussed topic which has initiated further recommendations. "Thus, faculty development in online teaching is a critical foundation for quality online education and justifies the need for an advisory panel of practitioners and researchers focused on faculty satisfaction, development, and support". (Meyer, 2013).

It is important to note that since there was no transition period from face-to-face to online delivery mode in the present circumstances, the much-needed training and preparation for online teaching was overlooked. As observed by Meyer (2013) in a similar study, the transition from online to face to face needs development over a period of time. "Only later did it become important to help faculty move away from face-to-face teaching methods toward more appropriate methods for online courses. As a first stage, faculty were encouraged to add technology to existing face-to-face courses, and then to move to new technologies and pedagogies useful for offering entire courses online."

(Meyer, 2013).

As explained in Theories and Frameworks for Online Education, there are models created for online learning such as Community of Inquiry (CoI), developed by Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000). Their model supports the design of online and blended courses as active learning environments or communities dependent on instructors and students sharing ideas, information, and opinions (Picciano, 2017). This is an extremely interactive model paving the way for students and teachers to carry out discussions using discussion boards, blogs, wikis, and videoconferencing.

In a theory proposed by Linda Harasim known as Online collaborative learning (OCL) the facilities of the internet to provide learning environments that foster collaboration and knowledge building are highlighted. It also focuses on the most challenging aspect of online evaluation. "CMSs/LMSs and other online tools and platforms provide a number of mechanisms to assist in this area. Papers, tests, assignments, and portfolios are among the major methods used for student learning assessment and are easily done electronically. Essays and term projects pass back and forth between teacher and student without the need for paper. Oral classroom presentations are giving way to YouTube videos and podcasts".

Further, Martina, F., Ritzhauptb, A., Kumarb, S., Budhrania, K. (2019) recommend "using a variety of assessments, using traditional and authentic assessments and used rubrics to assess students, course templates and quality assurance process and surveys, learning analytics, and peer reviews for assessment and evaluation" as discussed in their article, Award-winning faculty online teaching practices. Moreover, the life cycle of an online course is described as having three broad areas: online course design, facilitation and online assessment and evaluation in order to ensure the production of an effective online course. As discussed in their article, "the courses are carefully designed before, facilitated with intention during, systematically evaluated after, and revised accordingly to support learning objectives" (Martina et al., 2019).
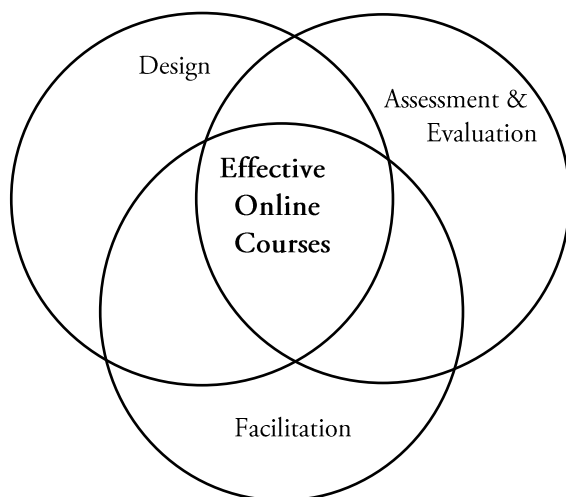
Figure 1: Conceptual framework for effective online courses: design, assessment and evaluation, and facilitation. (Martina et al., 2019)

In a study on student perceptions of online courses it was found that "instructor-led facilitation strategies lead to a stronger sense of community among the students (Martin et al., 2019). These findings are consistent with recent research findings illustrating that students valued instructor-to-student interactions most when compared to student-to-student and student-to content strategies (Epp, Phirangee, & Hewitt, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The three samples selected constituted of five (5) well experienced teachers who conducted the online sessions, five

(5) zoom session observations and three hundred and forty-nine (349) student responses. Out of the total population of Part II (1077) 859 sat for the CA test for whom the online questionnaire was made available.

However, only 349 responses were received. The teacher sample identified were both female and male in an age range between 40 and 60 years and teaching experience ranging between 10 and 30 years. All 5 were external teachers. The observations were conducted asynchronously by watching the video recordings of the sessions and the views of the observers were recorded as journal

entries.

The instruments adopted in the current study were questionnaires shared as google forms, interviews and observation journal entries. The interviews with the teachers were based on seven semi-structured questions aimed at eliciting the teachers' views on online delivery of English for Legal Studies. The questions were thus designed in order to encourage unrestricted opinions.

The observation journal entries were made under three main sections: delivery of the course, facilitating the rapport between teachers and students and preparation for assessment, followed by general comments. These observations were conducted asynchronously by watching the video recordings of the sessions.

The data gathered were then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

Certain strategies were used to maintain uniformity and to provide an online learning experience as close to onsite learning experience as far as possible. The online sessions were conducted using the zoom platform through premium accounts where a maximum of 300 participants could be accommodated.

However, the number of participants at a particular session varied. In order to cater to 1077 students registered at 8 regional centres using a minimum number of zoom connections, they were clustered in to 4 groups. The four most experienced teachers were selected, and each teacher was assigned the same group through a recurring meeting link to ensure greater familiarity and better interaction in an attempt to replicate the situation of face-to-face sessions.

Moreover, an online demonstration was held at the teacher briefing session via zoom prior to commencement of the course. In addition, a common deck of slides, designed and moderated by the teachers and approved by the Department was utilized as the main teaching aid for each lesson. Selected video recording of the lessons thus delivered were uploaded on the Learning Management System (LMS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained through the three instruments used in the present study will be discussed under the relevant sub-headings.

The analysis of quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire administered on students:
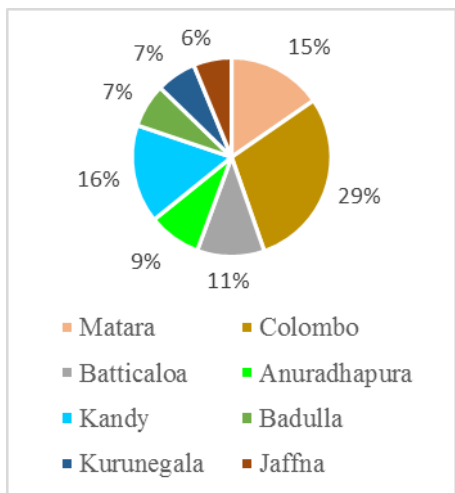
Figure 2: Regional Centres
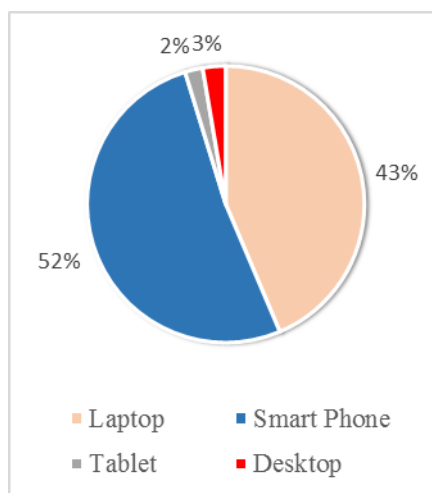
Figure 3: Device used

Figure 2 denotes the representation of the regional centres in this study and figure 3 indicates the device use by the students for online learning.
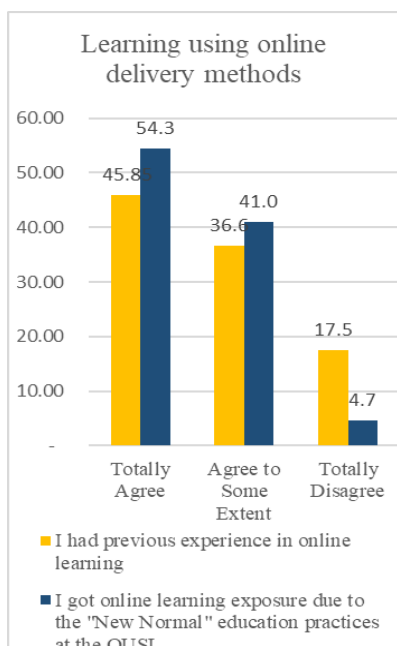
Figure 4: Learning using online delivery methods

According to the bar charts in Figure 4 the majority of the students have been exposed to online learning due to "new normal" education practices at the OUSL.

Thus, despite the fact that they did not have prior experience in online learning, they were ready to embark on online education owing to the unanticipated situation created by Covid.

Figure 5-8 display the Likert scale preferences indicated by the students for different attributes related to online education.

Question	Totally Agree	Agree to Some Extent	Totally Disagree
Instructions for logging in were clear enough	67.6%	30.9%	1.5%
I experienced technical difficulties in logging in	26.4%	53.9%	19.7%
I didn't have the required technical knowledge to log in	11%	33%	56%
I had no connection issues while attending the sessions in general	22.3%	58.4%	19.3%
I had a disturbance free environment to attend the online sessions from my location	37.9%	43.4%	18.7%
I had uninterrupted power supply during the session in general	28.7%	56.3%	15.0%

Figure 5: Success in attending online sessions

As figure 5 illustrates a vast majority of them had agreed that the instructions for logging in were clear enough. Although a majority of them think that they have the required technical knowledge (56%) they accept that they faced technical difficulties in logging in. This may be due to low internet signals or the devices (mainly mobile phones) not supporting the online application.

Question	Totally Agree	Agree to Some Extent	Totally Disagree
I prefer online English learning over face-to-face sessions	39.8%	48.2%	12.0%
The online sessions were convenient than face to face sessions	41.5%	47.5%	11.0%
I found this online English class interesting	58%	39.2%	02.8%
My attendance at online classes was much better than to face to face sessions	57.1%	34.9%	8.0%

Figure 6: Level of Convenience and interest in online sessions

As denoted by Figure 6, while 39.8% of them prefer online English education over face-to-face sessions 48.2% have indicated that they prefer a combination of both. A majority (58%) have found online English classes interesting, and it is confirmed by a vast majority agreeing that their attendance was much better at online classes than face to face sessions.

Question	Totally Agree	Agree to Some Extent	Totally Disagree
I used the chat box to communicate with the teacher	37.4%	46.7%	15.9%
I used the chat box to communicate with other participants	22.3%	42.5%	35.5%
If I had a doubt I unmuted and raised the question	43.1%	42.8%	14.1%
I responded to the teacher when he/she asked questions	47.0%	47.0%	6.0%
I did the writing activities in the class and completed the tasks	48.9%	44.8%	6.3%

Figure 7: Level of active participation during online sessions

According to Figure 7, the majority of the students have interacted well during the online session. However, the responses of the teachers indicated contradictory data. This could be due to the fact that the information was gathered online through a google questionnaire and only the volunteers filled the form. Thus, we can assume that the respondents were the student cohorts who are generally more technologically savvy and active in online platforms (out of 1077, 859 sat the CAT and 354 responded). Teachers' feedback focused on what they felt about active participation of the entire online classroom consisting about 100 students in general.

Question	Totally Agree	Agree to Some Extent	Totally Disagree
The slides used by the teacher were very useful and informative	68.6%	29.8%	1.6%
I found the day school recordings very useful	73%	23.6%	3.4%
I watched the day school videos posted on the online platform	53.2%	38.7%	8.1%

Figure 8: Perceptions on slides and video recordings

Almost all the students have agreed on the effectiveness of the slides which indicates that the use of the common deck of slides served its purpose well. Moreover, since 73% have found the day school recordings useful it can be assumed that they depended on the recordings if they missed day schools.

The analysis of qualitative data gathered through the questionnaire administered on students:

Question: How do you think the online sessions could be improved in the future?

Answering the question, students had given a variety of suggestions. Some of the outstanding ones were; conducting training sessions for both students and teachers on how the zoom application could be used effectively and efficiently, providing online based supplementary exercises/learning materials, practice sessions to be incorporated at the completion of each study unit, speech lessons to be included in the curriculum and interactive sessions to be included where the students could share ideas with peers and the teacher on

a given topic, to open up a discussion forum among the students as a post activity and support them maintain the focus by monitoring the discussion.

Question: Do you think a combination of online sessions, face to face sessions and LearnOUSL would be more effective?

Answering the question, a vast majority had indicated that they prefer online sessions due to numerous reasons such as having the opportunity to be taught by experienced teachers in the system irrespective of the centre, convenience in terms of travelling, less time investment and practicality. Moreover, some had specified that a combination of online sessions and LearnOUSL would be ideal if the course could be enriched with supplementary activities and upgraded. Contrastingly a very few responses were received saying that the most effective is the face-to-face mode of teaching as writing could be easily corrected and interactions facilitated.

Question: According to your view, what are the sections that need face to face teaching?

Students had various views in this regard. However, most of them had indicated that the writing section (essay and legal writing) needs face to face teaching specifically due to the fact that the teacher cannot reach each and every student to check and correct their writing in the online mode of delivery.

Question: Any other comment you would like to make on your experience of online sessions?

Some of the exceptional answers we received for this question out of many were: online delivery method, though it has its characteristic drawbacks, is an interesting, convenient and timely solution to complete the academic activities adhering to the time frame; It is felt that development of online learning material and activities, and integrating online resources, should take place if this method is to be continued.

It would be beneficial if lessons to enhance vocabulary and grammar could be incorporated in the future; it was an added advantage to build up rapport with colleagues in different regional centres as some centres were grouped together; online assessments were effective, but depended totally on weather, internet connection, power supply etc.

Online exams could have a detrimental effect on students who are under quarantine and living in

locked down areas. Further, it affects students living in remote locations where there are signal issues.

Findings from the teachers' interviews:

No	Question
1	According to your experience, do you think that online delivery system is effective in teaching English in ESP context? Please explain your answer in terms of enhancing the learners' competence and successful preparation for examinations.
	Responses and supporting quotes
	Effective: *"No doubt about it when the session materials are well prepared ahead of time with well-defined objectives of each session and the pedagogical approaches, foreseeing the potential difficulties."*	Face-to-Face is preferable since some students do not have the facilities for online learning: *"In my opinion It is not as effective as a face-to-face teaching / learning session since students face a lot of difficulties when they log in for the online session. Some of them don't have the proper study environment to be focused on what is being delivered"*	Revision through discussion of model paper was useful as preparation for examinations and more such revision should be provided. Further, revision should focus on the items to be tested: *"The CATs and the finals test items must ensure relevance that will create a sense of confidence in the minds of the learners that they are able to very well cope with their exams."*	Delivering content within stipulated time was successfully achieved, but the enhancement of competence was affected due to the shortening of the duration of the course delivered online: *"Rushing through a whole lot of content with the intention of completing syllabus only, will hinder or obstruct enhancing the learners' competence."*
2	In your opinion, what are the features that benefit teaching English in ESP context using online delivery method?

	Responses and supporting quotes		
	Use of PowerPoint: *"The use of power point presentation is very helpful"*	Facility of breakout rooms for group work: *"Also, the use of break up rooms will be effective in enabling discussions among students."*	Facility of Incorporating audio/video teaching material: *"Technological (audio/video) can be easily incorporated into teaching and learning activities."*
3	In your view, what are the draw backs that hamper teaching/learning facility in using online delivery method in ESP context?		
	Responses and supporting quotes		
	Students' passive participation*:* *"One of the main drawbacks is the lack of interaction between the teacher and the student. This can be very discouraging to the teacher as the teacher is not aware whether he/she has made himself/ herself clear to the student."*	Technological constraints: *"Technological constraints (poor internet access)"*	Unsuitable learning environment: *"Unsuitable background which is quite disturbing"*	Lack of proper facilities including devices and environment for teachers provided by Regional centres: *"There must be a completely private space for the sessions with devices that must a Tutor to commence the session without any delays with technical problems"*

4	What can you say about the tutor-student interactions during an online session?		
	Responses and supporting quotes		
	Very few students interacted with teacher: *"Tutor--Student interaction was very low during my sessions"*	Poor teacher-student interaction demotivates teacher: *"This situation sometimes demotivates the tutor as well"*	Teaching method used and preparation of lesson affects interaction: *"Depends on the teacher's involvement and preparation of lesson and the methodology used"*
5	Are you satisfied with the measures that were taken to maintain uniformity across the country while delivering the online course? Or do you have more innovative ideas that could further improve uniformity of online delivery?		
	Responses and supporting quotes		
	Satisfied: *"Of course, I was satisfied with the measures that had been taken to maintain uniformity across the country"*		Uniformity not required: *"There is no protocol to be followed"*
6	What are your suggestions in order to improve English Language Teaching in the ESP context through online delivery method in the future?		

	Responses and supporting quotes				
	Setting homework and providing feedback: "If a task sheet could be added for each session and discuss it before we start the next session would motivate students to look forward"	Training on online teaching: "I feel that all Tutors doing online teaching should be given a training, so that they will be more confident and do a good job"	Forming smaller groups: "Having smaller groups could benefit both the teacher and student and improve interaction"	Providing an inducive environment to engage in teaching /learning: "proper environment to be provided"	Provision to use suitable material and teaching techniques to suit the competency level of the learner: "Use of relevant simplified materials and application of suitable teaching technique as per each session content which has to be devised by the Tutor as per the level of knowledge and skills of students"
7	Do you think that this method of delivery would be effective in teaching all four language skills? If not, how best can we improve the effectiveness of teaching all four language skills in the future?				

Responses and supporting quotes				
Effective for Reading & Writing: *"This method of delivery is effective with reading and writing"*	Should include Listening & Speaking to increase students' interest: *"If listening and speech sessions could be included in between it won't be boring. This may motivate students to join the meetings regularly."*	Should increase writing exercises: *"In terms of the writing skill more written exercises are needed"*	Effective for all skills but training for teachers & students needed: *"Effective for all four skills but both teachers and learners should be provided hand-on training"*	Feedback and model answers should be provided: *"… by providing model phrases and sentences and by correcting their writings by receiving them through emails, correcting and sending them back with needed remarks"*

Figure 9: Findings from the Teachers' interviews

VIEWS OF THE OBSERVERS:

The use of a pre-designed common set of slides definitely has its advantages for both teachers and students. The identical delivery of the content to students across the country ensures that no one is disadvantaged.

However, a drawback observed in adhering to a common set of slides is that the teacher may not be able to use his/her individuality and spontaneity. On the other hand, a talented teacher would be able to get over this by using the slides as a guide but personalizing the teaching by way of explanation.

The passive participation of students is found to be one of the downsides of online day schools. This behaviour of students affects the teacher negatively, losing the teacher's confidence on the success of ability to transmit knowledge. Therefore, assigning the same group of students to a particular teacher at every day school will mitigate the adverse effects of catering to large, strange student populations online. Over the period of day schools, the students will form connections with one another and the teacher, which will allow them to be familiar with the online class. Hence, it would facilitate smooth delivery of the lessons online.

At the last day school, a discussion of a model final examination paper was carried out by sharing the paper on the screen and discussing the correct answers orally. This session served as a revision of the lessons learnt, while giving an opportunity to know how final evaluation would be done. However, it was felt that it would have been more successful if the paper had been shared with the students beforehand.

It was observed that many precautionary measures have been taken to improve the course such as providing a common set of slides, assigning a particular group of students to a teacher throughout the course duration, designing CAs to be held online, etc.

However, it was observed that certain measures could be taken for further improvement. A blended mode of delivery where online day schools and evaluation are combined with onsite language clinics/workshops and evaluation would create the ideal language teaching/learning experience. It must be commented that using online technology in the context of teaching/learning ESP provided the opportunity to engage in educational environment befitting

tertiary level education. Hence, such features could be exploited innovatively for language teaching.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study attempted to find the success of the online method adopted in the delivery of lessons and preparation for assessment in the ELS programme during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data revealed both positive and negative experiences of the teachers and the students, confirmed by the views of the observers.

The positive perceptions projected were mainly based on the steps taken to maintain uniformity in the content delivered across the country, the arrangements made proactively to ensure continuity of education during the pandemic, conducting CAs online in order to ensure that the students receive the maximum benefit of an Overall Continuous Assessment Mark (OCAM), enabling them to sit the final assessment and the attempt to address the issue of absenteeism through the recorded sessions.

Furthermore, it was observed that the recording facility in zoom provided the teachers a rare chance to watch their own lessons and further improve their teaching approaches, and also the online

sessions provided great opportunities to supplement the lessons with more interactive personalized components.

The negative experiences highlighted a variety of issues such as passive participation of students during the sessions, inadequacy in writing activities, unfamiliarity with the use of technology for educational purposes and the inability to create a balanced CA component conducted under an ideal examination environment. Furthermore, the inability to see the facial expressions of the students was given as a limitation by the teachers, due to the absence of nonverbal feedback.

The suggestions to address these issues included provision for training of teachers and students, adopting a blended mode of delivery to ensure an authentic environment for the use of the language and designing material and activities suitable for an online platform. Moreover, some teachers and students have recommended that the online lessons could well serve teaching and assessing speaking skills, using the facilities available on the zoom application. However, the successfulness of an online lesson highly depended on the teacher as the students could leave the session as soon as they felt it was ineffective.

Thus, it can be concluded that a blended mode of delivery, designed incorporating a fully-fledged online course in line with the distance education policies, would be beneficial for the students in all aspects.

Therefore, emphasis should be paid to enhancing the present mode of delivery through providing extensive training to teachers and guidelines to students on engaging in online education, while creating a specially designed online course with integrated online activities and learning materials which would be parallelly made available to the students with online day schools.

Furthermore, the course should be enhanced with all the language skills so that assessment of all skills is made possible through online and offline modes.

Hence, it is believed that the incorporation of the recommendations provided would ensure an all encompassed online learning experience for the students of ELS at the OUSL.

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THE APPLICATION OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY TO SUSTAIN THE PUBLIC DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS IN SRI LANKA DURING THE POST COVID-19

S.S.N. Ariyawardana[2]

ABSTRACT

Modern diplomacy has a long history of serving as a practical and convenient method of managing official interactions between sovereign states. With the rapid development of the communication technology, the traditional diplomatic procedures have been digitalized as 'Digital Diplomacy' which is practiced by various governments throughout the world as a form of public diplomatic missions. This study looks into the applications and impacts of digital diplomacy on Sri Lanka's public diplomatic practices during the COVID-19 period. The data and information for this study were acquired through a qualitative and quantitative archival research using books, journals, e-publications and government websites with a particular focus on the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry. This survey reveals that more than 75% of overall population who use social media in Sri Lanka consumes Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp for communication purposes while more than 50% of population uses Instagram to keep up with the world order. However, in Sri Lanka, the use of social media in government digital diplomatic practices has yet to be developed in order to maintain public diplomatic missions. Furthermore, this study discovered that the benefits of digital diplomacy include strengthening international relations, fostering two-way communication, and ensuring minimal contamination of people while threats to cyber security, spreading extremism, and losing the exclusive power of state are the disadvantages. The digital diplomatic practices of Sri Lanka are challenged by technological difficulties, linguistic constraints, lack of education, awareness and the knowledge. To promote digital diplomacy in Sri Lanka, this study recommends providing social media training to the government officials, establishing a consistent official website for all consular affairs and introducing social media profiles for embassies and high commissions. Finally, this study suggests that using digital diplomacy may help to sustain public diplomatic missions in Sri Lanka throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: *Digital, Public, Diplomacy, Mission, COVID-19*

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INTRODUCTION

With the establishment of the first embassies in 13th century, the history of modern diplomacy can be traced back to the state of Northern Italy in the early Renaissance. Diplomacy is a formal means of maintaining international relations between states. It is a recognized and official method of influencing the actions and the decisions taken by the foreign governments and the people through dialogues. It can also be introduced as a convenient method of conducting formal contacts between sovereign states. These approaches could be bilateral or multi-lateral methods used by two or more states. The majority of diplomatic affairs are conducted through intelligence gatherings of delegates who are accountable for the foreign policy decision making of sending-state and the host state. However, since the end of 2019, diplomatic affairs have been affected by the unprecedented travel restrictions and the border closures due to global outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic

Therefore, in certain countries, the traditional diplomatic efforts have been transformed into virtual face-to-face meetings through "Digital Diplomacy".

"Digital Diplomacy" is an emerging phenomenon that has changed traditional diplomatic methods as a result of the revolutionary alterations in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The current ICT and the COVID-19 concerns have altered the traditional diplomatic approach to state and non-state actors. Hence, the traditional diplomatic engagements have been transformed into virtual procedures and social media has created a dialogue between citizens and government. Digital diplomacy is the most contemporary technique of sustaining international relations based on social media platforms managed by the official representatives of state, diplomats, members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Heads of the States. Digital Diplomacy allows governments to directly engage with a larger audience of civil society and exert significant influence over other governments and individuals. It is operated with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms in conducting international relations through diplomacy.

Most countries are currently pursuing diplomatic solutions to maintain the international relations in the face of COVID-19 pandemic's hurdles and

restrictions. However, because digital diplomacy has enabled numerous participations in international policy making processes, international relations have become more complicated as a result of digital diplomacy. Furthermore, despite creating a global platform for public opinion, digital diplomacy reduces exclusive monopoly of the state over the decision making power. The earliest example of digital diplomacy was marked in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro for the first time, where the negotiations were conducted by emails. Malta was operated in the same fashion at the same time, and Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic studies was found as the first unit for computer application in diplomacy. Arab Spring is known as the origin of digital diplomacy that was responsible for 80% of the young recruitments to Jihadi movement in 2008. Moreover, the WikiLeaks scandal of 2010, which exposed 250,000 cables passed between US missions, was a significant milestone of digital diplomacy (Rashica, 2018). In 2011, Russia as the largest internet market joined the club of "Twiplomacy Great Powers". Sweden is implementing a digital diplomacy online communication strategy, whereas the United Kingdom has formed an office of Digital Diplomacy that involves a range of

diplomatic activities. Consequently, Sweden foreign minister Carl Bildt has been named the "Best Connected Twitter Leader" (Adesina, 2017). In terms of Asia, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in India posted its first Tweet in 2010 to digitalize their official diplomatic operations. During the civil war in Libya in 2011, India made the finest use of Twitter by assisting and facilitating more than 18,000 Indian citizens. India is actively experimenting their digital diplomatic affairs despite their resource constraints and poor computer literacy (Adesina, 2017).

In the instance of Sri Lanka, border restrictions enacted in response to the rapid outbreak of COVID-19 have hampered and limited public diplomatic affairs for the past two years. As a result, Digital Diplomacy procedures and practices should be adopted in Sri Lanka at present. In this scenario, there are various hurdles to exercising digital diplomacy in Sri Lanka while maintaining its public diplomatic missions and foreign policy objectives. However, embracing digital diplomacy could be important as well as critical to achieving the goals of Sri Lanka foreign policy while pursuing the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study examines the suggested theme while answering the research

questions listed below.

RQ1: How is the social media being used to maintain public diplomatic relations in Sri Lanka at present?

RQ2: What are the benefits, drawbacks and limitations of engaging in Digital Diplomacy for Sri Lanka?

RQ3: What are the recommendations for putting in place an effective Digital Diplomatic practice in Sri Lanka to boost public diplomatic missions during COVID-19 pandemic?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study relies on secondary qualitative and quantitative data and information gathered through an archival research. This archival research was carried out using the Governmental e-documentations on public diplomacy and the government's websites with special focus on Sri Lanka Foreign Ministry. The related websites provided up-to-date information for investigating and evaluating Sri Lanka's current practices of public diplomacy and digital diplomacy efforts. Further, the related books, journals and e-publications were used to examine the theoretical framework of digital diplomacy

and relationship between the two concepts of public diplomacy and digital diplomacy.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Diplomacy is a term that has been transformed into several phases from time to time according to the nature of its functions. Throughout this transmission, digital diplomacy (also known as e-diplomacy) could play a significant role in modern diplomacy. Digital diplomacy can occur with the use of internet, communication and information technologies; however, it could be beneficial and occasionally be challenging for the states. At the meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives, the president of Russia Vladimir Putin introduced the digital diplomacy as the most effective tool of foreign policy making. Therefore, this section examines the theoretical framework of digital diplomacy through the perspective of using 'soft power' (Adesina, 2017: 6). Joseph Nye (2009) defines it as "the ability to set the agenda in world politics through persuasion, enticing and attracting others through the force of one's beliefs, values and ideas, and not through military or economic coercion" (Nye, 2009: 88 as cited in Reshetnikova, 2018: 1)

According to Dr. Luis Ritto

(2014), telegraph and telephone improved the communication between countries and diplomatic affairs in the latter part of 19th century. Gradually, the technology of facsimile system has been allowed by the ambassadors and share important matters and issues promptly. Further, the consular systems are also conveyed via facsimile system with regard to receiving important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, passports and visa after 1980s. Friedman (2005) claims that "the evolution of internet makes the world increasingly flat", since it played a crucial role in connecting the globe with each other while making comparative advantages of different markets. Further, Abbasove (2007) cited that, "it was a gradual shift from telegrams to mobile phones and more recently to Skype, postal letters to e-mails, short messages (SMS) to twitter posts, hard-copy invitations to Facebook events, TV announcements to YouTube channels, costly meetings to web-conferences and even from physical embassies to net-based virtual missions". This evolution emphasizes that the diplomacy has always been adopted with the global changes of ICT. As a result, many countries have seized their physical diplomatic affairs and are actively following websites, blogs, Facebooks, Instagram, Twitter and other social media platforms to

pursue the objectives of their foreign policy through digital diplomacy.

According to Holmes (2015: 15), Digital Diplomacy is defined as a "strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaborations" emphasizing its collaborative nature of both online and offline. Further, digital diplomacy refers "mainly to the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation" (Manor & Segev, 2015). Lewis (2014) defines digital diplomacy as "the use of digital tools of communication (social media) by diplomats to communicate with each other and with the general public" while Potter (2002) introduces the concept as "the diplomatic practices through digital and networked technologies, including the Internet, mobile devices, and social media channels".

Ben Scott, the Innovation Adviser to former US secretary Hillary Clinton has outlined three components of digital diplomacy as follows (Funnel, 2014 as cited in Adesina, 2017: 5).

✓ Public diplomacy, including the use of online platforms.

✓ Building   expertise   in

technology, policy and understanding the way the internet influences international developments such as political movements.

✓ Impact on development policy and how ICT can be used more effectively to promote economic growth around the world.

"Digital Diplomacy is a form of new public diplomacy which uses the internet, new information and communication technologies (ICT) and social media as means for strengthening diplomatic relations. The main differences with the classical public diplomacy lie in a greater access to information, greater interaction among individuals and organizations, and greater transparency" (Chakraborty, 2013 as cited in Rashica, 2018: 77). Hanson (2012) outlines the main policy goals of digital diplomacy as follows.

✓ **Knowledge management:** To harness departmental and whole of government knowledge, so that it is retained, shared and its use optimized in pursuit of national interests abroad.

✓ **Public diplomacy:** To maintain contact with audiences as they migrate online and to harness new

communication tools to listen to and target important audiences with key messages and to influence major online influencers.

✓ **Information management:** To help aggregate the overwhelming flow of information and to use this to better inform policy-making and to help anticipate and respond to emerging social and political movements.

✓ **Consular communications and response:** To create direct personal communications channels with citizens travelling overseas, with manageable communications in crises.

✓ **Disaster response:** To harness the power of connective technologies in disaster response situations.

✓ **Internet freedom:** Creation of technologies to keep the internet free and open. This has the related objectives of promoting freedom of speech and democracy as well as undermining authoritarian regimes.

✓ **External resources:** Creating digital mechanisms to draw on and harness external expertise to advance national goals.

✓ **Policy planning:** To allow for effective oversight,

coordination and planning of international policy across government, in response to the internationalization of the bureaucracy.

(Hanson, 2012 as cited in Adesina, 2017:3)

According to Prof. Aktaş, the Digital Diplomacy could change and transform the diplomatic norms and customs. On the other hand, the world leaders and diplomats are increasingly using social media platforms and are supported by the internet tools especially Twitter and Instagram in diplomacy. The digitalization of diplomacy might deeply affect the traditional diplomacy in four different dimensions: institutional structure of diplomacy, diplomacy executives, those affected by diplomacy and the method of execution of diplomacy. Further, digital diplomacy can make some risks and dangers towards states. In certain cases, digital diplomacy can become an important weapon for terrorists, radical organizations and foreign ideologies. As a result, cyber-attacks can be constituted through digital diplomacy. Moreover, Russian International Affairs Council argues that the digital diplomacy which is supported by new technologies does not replace the conventional form of traditional diplomacy. Therefore, council further

emphasizes that,

"…digital diplomacy is mainly applicative in nature and is particularly useful in working with foreign audiences in matters of relaying the official position and building up the image of the state. It is important to understand that it is unlikely to ever replace diplomacy in its conventional sense. Closed talks will remain closed. However, digital diplomacy is capable of explaining why a certain decision was made, what results it will give, how it will influence the foreign policy process, i.e. of opening public access to the results of conventional diplomacy" (Permyakova, 2012 as cited in Hocking and Melissen, 2015: 24)

According to above review, Digital Diplomacy can be simply defined as the process of using the internet and ICT to achieve the goals/objectives of foreign policy in a certain country. The discussion of this study will expose the implementation and influence of digital diplomacy on Sri Lanka's public diplomatic missions in the post-COVID-19 period, based on above theoretical and practical world context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines the role of digital diplomacy in shaping public diplomatic affairs in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study discusses the use of social media in Sri Lanka to maintain digital diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy, as well as the challenges, risks, and benefits of digital diplomacy in current public diplomatic mission in Sri Lanka.

Figure 1 depicts the global social media usage and it reveals that consumers prioritized Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. More than 1,000 million individuals use the aforementioned social media sites around the world, with Twitter being the least popular. In a worldwide context, Twitter, which is used by just 353 million people, ranks last in the list of social media platforms utilized by the ordinary public.
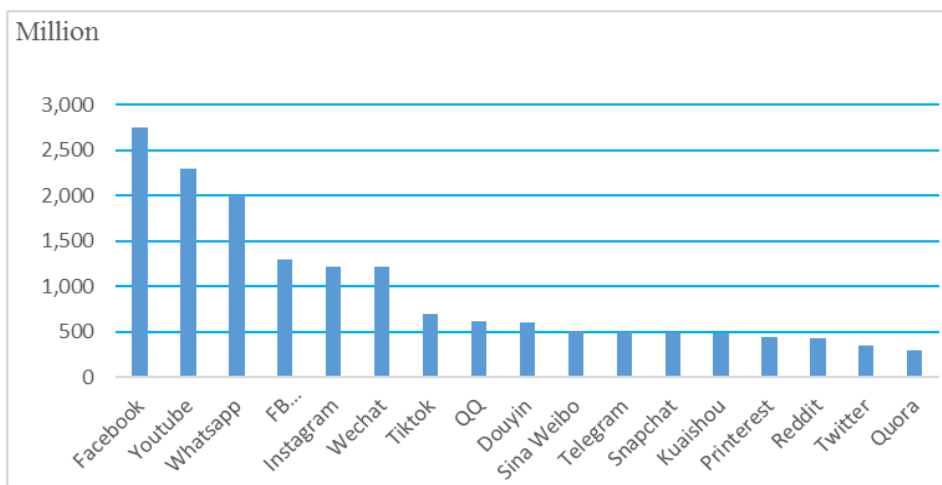
Figure 1. The World's Most-used Social Platforms 2021 (Million)

Figure 2 shows the local consumption of social media in Sri Lanka. By 2021, the most popular social media platforms in Sri Lanka, such as Facebook and YouTube have surpassed 75% of users across all age groups. Instagram and Twitter are also gaining in popularity among persons aged 13 to 34. According to the social media statistics, Colombo and Gampaha districts have the greatest social media consumption in Sri Lanka. According to Facebook data, nearly all of 6 million users of

social media platforms are entertained by Facebook (Hattotuwa, November 2018: 5). In the light of this, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, as well as other social media platforms could be used to directly address the community through digital diplomacy, providing a common platform for local people to share political, social and cultural issues and ideologies with an international audience. This could be a good approach for Sri Lanka to enhance public diplomacy through digital diplomatic methods instead of traditional diplomatic procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic.
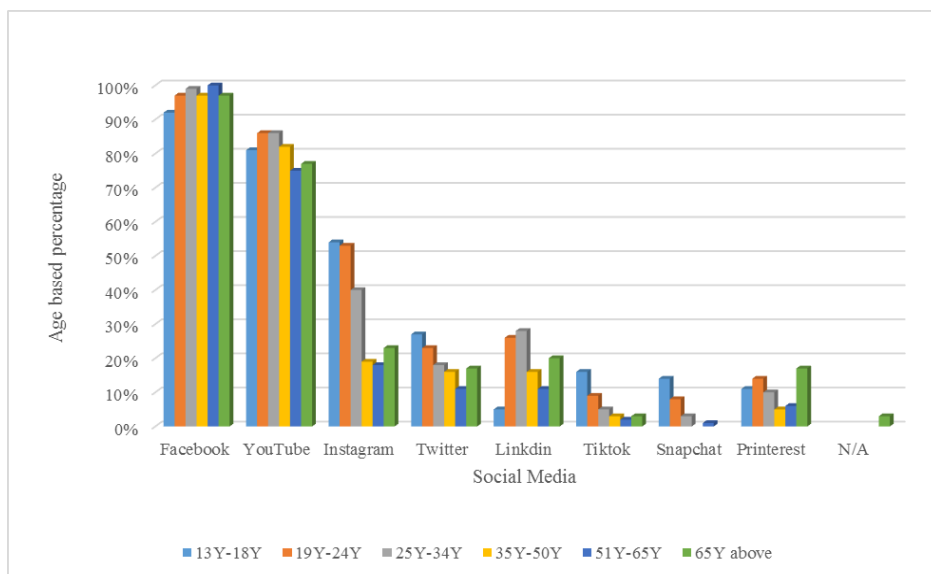
Figure 2: Local Consumption of Social Media Platforms in Sri Lanka, 2021
Source: Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (APIDM), 2021:18

When comparing global and local statistics of social media usage, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms for reaching out to the public audience both locally and globally. As a result, it can be stated that digital diplomatic practices in Sri Lanka should be promoted predominantly through Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram, with Twitter being used on occasion. Promotion of Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram as the most popular social media platforms among the ordinary people may be necessary to reach a larger national and international audience through digital diplomacy. During the

COVID-19 period, it will be effective for the government to maintain direct public diplomatic missions while dealing with public opinion from a national and worldwide audience avoiding physical encounters. Furthermore, direct public access through digital diplomacy may reduce the use of human resources as well as other resources, resulting in cost-effectiveness for the government.

Unfortunately, in Sri Lanka, social media platforms are primarily used for informal rather than official communication among the officials, politicians and ordinary communities. As a result, now is the moment to execute formal debates among people through digital diplomacy using social media to contribute to Sri Lanka's public diplomatic missions.

4.1. THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY PRACTICES OF SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT AS A FORM OF ITS PUBLIC DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

This sub-section looks at how the government of Sri Lanka uses social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Zoom Technology, etc.) in the procedures of public diplomatic missions. According to the findings of this study, there are a few successful stories of using Digital Diplomacy being sustained through public diplomatic

missions performed by the Sri Lanka Foreign Ministry.

As part of Sri Lanka's public diplomatic strategy, the former Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardana announced on 01 July 2020 that the country has launched a "Contact Sri Lanka Portal" in collaboration with Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) to find digital solutions for traditional practices of diplomacy during the COVID-19 period. Sri Lanka also adopted the "Global Declaration on the Digital Response to COVID-19" at the virtual ministerial conference hosted by Estonia and Singapore with over 60 countries in attendance (Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, 03 July 2020). Moreover, the Twitter Pages of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the minister of Foreign Affairs Dinesh Gunawardana which engage in digital diplomacy can be found at @MFA_SriLanka and @DCRGunawardena respectively (Gunawardana, 2016).

Sri Lanka's digital diplomacy potential is still in its infancy. However, at the individual and organizational levels, the Sri Lankan government engages in limited digital diplomatic practices. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka has yet to commit to define a

digital diplomatic strategy, plan or program for the improvement of the country's digital diplomacy in the future (Jayatilaka, 2020).

Further, the social media usage in Sri Lankan politics has given the priorities for;

✓ Online conspiracies and campaigns

✓ Maintaining popularity during election periods (i.e. In comparison to 26 official Facebook pages of politicians, 4 official Facebook pages are anchored by Rajapaksas generating around 33% total engagement in Social Media through Facebook)

✓ Making political echo chamber

✓ In the elections as a media campaign anchored by political parties as well as civil societies

✓ conducting social movement protests (i.e. the massive social movement protest led by Mr. Namal Rajapaksa called 'Jana Balaya Colombata' is totally promoted by social media through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in Sri Lanka) and,

✓ Leveraging constitution and its design

(Source: Hattotuwa, November 2018:6-9)

According to above facts, social media use in Sri Lankan politics is ineffective in terms of sustaining public opinion in a diplomatic manner. In Sri Lanka, the political authorities have failed to fully exploit the potential of social media to sustain foreign relations through diplomacy. The majority of the diplomatic missions listed above do not address the general public opinion in Sri Lanka. The existing practice of the government in public diplomacy does not adequately convey the public opinion of the Sri Lankan people. Furthermore, the transfer of information from the government to the public and public to the government may not be sustained by the government's public diplomatic missions, as these missions are still entertained by a small and specific audience who participate in traditional diplomacy. As a result, public diplomatic mission in Sri Lanka has been challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic with travel restrictions at present. Hence, it would be important and crucial to introduce an alternative diplomatic practice instead of traditional diplomatic procedures to avoid problems. Therefore, digital diplomacy could be suggested to be promoted as a form of public diplomacy in Sri Lanka in the future.

In this background, this paper

examines the impact and applicability of digital diplomacy to maintain and achieve public diplomacy and its goals throughout COVID-19 era. In Sri Lanka, digital diplomacy could bring communities together directly through social media platforms, bypassing traditional diplomatic methods. This could provide a wide range of opportunities for the citizens to voice their views and opinions to the government through active and direct participation in public diplomatic missions both within and outside of Sri Lanka. As a result, digital diplomacy will be a sustainable tool for public diplomatic missions to maintain public opinion through direct community participation in diplomacy in the future. In this perspective, the next section of this paper will examine the benefits, drawbacks, and challenges of digital diplomacy in delivering Sri Lanka's public diplomatic missions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2. BENEFITS OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY TO SRI LANKA

Digital diplomacy creates additional benefits for maintaining public diplomacy, particularly in the event of a pandemic, as we are currently witnessing. This could allow the public and delegates to deal with foreign governments without leaving their host countries under minimum contamination with outside people. This section will look at how to use social media platforms to benefit from digital diplomacy through public diplomatic missions in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strengthening international relations

Digital diplomacy has the potential to make states' foreign affairs more successful and efficient than traditional diplomacy. It also helps the advancement of foreign policy goals, international alignment, direct public engagements and the interactions of state and non-state actors through social media. Digital diplomacy may assist in maintenance of legitimacy and the development of partnerships among the states in order to strengthen international relations especially during the COVID-19 global pandemic in Sri Lanka.

Fostering two-way communication

According to Rudolf Bekink, the Netherlands Ambassador to the United States "the digital arena opens new possibilities from one-on-one conversations to dialogues with communities" (Hocking and Melissen, 2015: 25). Traditional diplomacy is based on the interactions between the

government representatives and the officials, however, the adoption of digital diplomatic practices may allow government officials to interact and communicate directly with public audiences and individuals via Twitter and Facebook, resulting in open conversation spaces for various debates. Individuals may be able to influence government policies through two-way communication (Ross, 2011: 451-455). Finally, governments and their foreign policies may benefit from these discussions through digital diplomacy since they will be able to argue public opinion on specific issues (Bjola and Holmes, 2015: 1-9).

Accelerating the dissemination of information

People would be unable to move and would have to be locked-down during a pandemic period, thus the flow of information about public affairs would be suspended. Therefore, traditional diplomatic missions would be ineffective and inefficient in such instances. In case of such a pandemic, social media will be significant for communicating with the public and circulating information around the world by employing digital diplomacy tactics. During the COVID-19 outbreak, various countries have used social media to interact with their citizens who are

under quarantine as a part of their public diplomatic missions (De La Garza, 2020).

Delivering fast, efficient and cost effective diplomatic services

Digital diplomacy is fast, efficient and cost effective because it uses social media platforms for communication, service delivery, documentation, conducting consular affairs and interviews. Furthermore, it will allow embassies to work with fewer officers while serving comparatively a broader range of clients than traditional diplomacy allows. In addition, digital diplomacy may lower the cost of maintaining traditional diplomacy by reducing the requirement for human resources. As a result, digitalization of diplomacy will be cost effective.

Ensuring minimal contamination of people

It will be important to conduct consular and diplomatic affairs via social media since it ensures that people are not contaminated while working during the pandemic. Digital diplomacy may limit the physical meetings of people, as it facilitates online meetings using Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, etc. These online forums have the potential to bring people from all over the world together, and those

forums could be valuable in promoting public diplomacy during COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, digital diplomacy would reduce the risk of spreading the virus through diplomatic channels.

Create a mass availability and accessibility for public services through digitalization

Digital diplomacy can help to digitalize public services that serve a greater variety of clients simultaneously by establishing consular services such as investment supports, travel services, passports, and visa applications on an internet basis. It will make more availability and accessibility than traditional practices and methods. These procedures might be important in the event of travel restrictions due to COVID-19. Moreover, these virtual procedures would be cost effective and less time consuming for the people.

4.3. DRAWBACKS OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN SRI LANKA

Diplomats can lose the monopoly of their role in reporting information

Digital diplomacy has the potential to alter the role of the diplomat's job. It will not take into account the responsibilities of a diplomat who represents his/her government, nation and the citizen while he/she is overseas, and reports information back to the government. Therefore, the diplomat will lose his/her monopoly in reporting information as a part of his/her role and this monopoly could be shifted to the citizens who can easily share the information with the general public via social media.

Spreading extremism

According to Kalathil (2013), the use of social media networks in digitalization of diplomacy may lead terrorism and imposition of foreign ideologies. Various extremist organizations can use social media to disseminate their threats to the norms, values and objectives of the international arena (Kalathil, 2013 as cited in Rashica, 2018: 82). Therefore, the small states like Sri Lanka could be vulnerable to external threats such as terrorism, which poses a threat against its sovereignty, demographic integrity, and socio-cultural identity. As well, the extremists' ideologies could be amplified over the foreign policy and decision making of minor states like Sri Lanka through digital diplomacy.

Losing the exclusive power of State

The traditional diplomacy is carried out by the delegates who are appointed by the sovereign states on behalf of the state and its public. Consequently, the traditional diplomacy may not be able to challenge the sole power of the state. However, in case of digitalization of public diplomacy, the influence of external audience over the sovereign state may expand. In this situation, the small states such as Sri Lanka may lose its sole power of decision making due to the involvements of world super powers and other powerful states. This might jeopardize the sovereignty of small countries like Sri Lanka.

The culture of Anonymity

In the anonymous culture, one individual might impersonate another and cause harm to the person who has nominated and performed as the actual person. As a result of disseminating false information, this could lead to complicated issues. Cases exercising anonymity have the potential to cause mistrust between nations.

4.4. CHALLENGES OF PRACTICING DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN SRI LANKA

During COVID-19 pandemic, digital diplomacy will be a significant tool for enduring public diplomatic missions in Sri Lanka. However, due to the social and technical constraints such as lack of awareness, poor education and technical knowledge, poverty and political corruptions, digital diplomatic methods are difficult to implement in the Island. This section will discuss the challenges of establishing effective public diplomatic missions using digital diplomacy as a technological approach towards traditional diplomacy during the post COVID-19 era in Sri Lanka.

Threatening the cyber security

The rapid flow of information can be beneficial, but it can also be a challenge for a country if sensitive information is leaked, data and accounts are stolen. The most famous example in this regard is that the US confidential foreign policy files that had been shared between US embassies were publicly released by the United States scandal WikiLeaks allowing the entire world access into it (Manor, 2015). According to Adesina (2017), cyber security can be challenged by online anonymity exposing users to inaccurate and misleading information, particularly in public announcements on social media accounts. As a technologically poor country, Sri Lanka would be increasingly concerned about cyber security issues and threats in the

future in the engagements of digital diplomacy.

Technological difficulties experienced by ordinary people

Throughout the rapid technological evolution of the world, Sri Lanka has remained as a relatively impoverished country. The primary goal of public diplomacy is to communicate directly with international/foreign audiences. Unfortunately, the technological difficulties in Sri Lanka, particularly in remote areas, prevent people from connecting with foreign audience engaging in public diplomacy through digitalization. As a result, the public opinion and the inter-personal relationships in Sri Lanka are constrained to a small political group at present scenario of pandemic. Under these current circumstances, the public opinion is not conveyed properly through public diplomacy in the island. Therefore, the public opinion of a majority of rural people could be neglected and discriminated through digital diplomatic procedures.

Lack of education, awareness and the knowledge regarding the technology as well as the concept of Diplomacy

In Sri Lanka, especially rural people face with challenges to obtain secondary education, and majority are deprived of tertiary education at university level. As a result, majority of the people lack technological and conceptual awareness when it comes to diplomacy, political and social matters. In this background, the voices of these people are not represented in the international political debates. Due to the absence of formal and accessible digital diplomatic procedures in Sri Lanka, the public opinion of majority is not properly conveyed through public diplomatic missions at present. Because of lack of awareness, education and knowledge regarding the diplomatic missions and technology, the public opinion could be spoiled and misled by the parties who use digital technologies. Therefore, public awareness of the technology and diplomacy will be important to entertain gains of digital diplomacy in Sri Lanka for public audience.

Linguistic constraints

Sinhala is the official language in Sri Lanka and the majority of the ordinary people speak in Sinhala. Most of the social media platforms use English Language and therefore, when the host people engage with foreign audiences via social media, they should be fluent in English as a universal language.

As a result, the language hurdles may prevent the majority of Sri Lankans' direct involvements in public diplomacy through social media. Therefore, the government has been forced to designate delegates on behalf of that majority through traditional diplomacy; however, the public opinion would not be realized through these traditional procedures at present.

Customizing digital diplomacy to fit with the individual needs

According to the Netherlands Ambassador to USA, Rudolf Bekink, "one challenge in this field is choosing the appropriate technological platform that allows you to reach your target audience. We should not be engaging in a one-size fits-all strategy, but customizing digital diplomacy to our specific needs" (Hocking and Melissen, 2015: 25). Customizing digital diplomacy platform in a country like Sri Lanka would be difficult, because the general public may have limited access to social media platforms. Therefore, the customization of social media for ground-level citizens in Sri Lanka to participate in public diplomatic missions via diaspora would be a challenge even at present. As well, digital diplomacy will be a challenge for the people who do not use and are not familiar with appropriate and recommended social media

platforms in digital diplomatic practices. In that case, Sri Lankan government is not economically and technologically strong enough to tailor the digital diplomacy with the target group and their needs.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The origin and development of digital diplomacy may be traced back to the end of the twentieth century with the launch of Public Diplomacy 2.0 in 2008, WikiLeaks scandal in 2010 and especially the Arab Spring in 2011. As a form of using 'soft power', social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, Instagram, and Snap chat have become an important communicative tool in shaping public diplomacy for politicians, diplomats and the general public at present. In the post COVID-19 period, the application of digital diplomacy in Sri Lanka will be a significant strategic approach for realizing public diplomatic missions. The significant changes in social media as a result of technological advancements will lead to a new era of public diplomacy that will be digitalized through digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is developed with the ICT, internet and social media to achieve its main goals towards knowledge management, public diplomacy, information

management, consular communication and response, internet freedom, external resources and policy planning.

This study examined the application of digital diplomacy in Sri Lanka using social media to sustain public diplomatic missions during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The study evaluated the social media usage of the people at national and international levels. It revealed that more than 75% of overall people are using Facebook, You Tube, Twitter and WhatsApp while more than 50% of overall people use Instagram for the purposes of informal communication around the world as well as in Sri Lanka. However, despite this high potential scenario of using social media among public, the digital diplomatic practices in Sri Lanka are still weak and yet to be developed in order to sustain public diplomacy even during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study further examined the advantages, disadvantages and challenges of Digital Diplomacy in Sri Lanka as an approach for promoting public diplomatic missions. Strengthening international relations, fostering two-way communication, accelerating the dissemination of information, ensuring minimal contamination of people, and providing fast, efficient and cost effective diplomatic services are

identified as advantages, while challenges for cyber security, spreading extremism, losing the exclusive power of state and the culture of anonymity are discovered as disadvantages of establishing digital diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy in Sri Lanka. Moreover, technological difficulties with ordinary people, lack of education, awareness and the knowledge about technology as well as the concept of diplomacy, linguistic constraints and tailoring digital diplomacy to meet individual needs are revealed as challenges in Sri Lanka towards digitalization of public diplomacy. Therefore, as a country which has been severely affected by COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka should realize the applicability and effectiveness of digital diplomacy in directing public diplomatic missions to increase the participation of the foreign and local communities in order to minimize the negative impacts of traditional diplomacy in the future.

5.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Providing a social media training to the government officials

As the front line of diplomatic procedures, outgoing government officials, delegates, diplomats and relevant departmental officers should be provided a social media

training to foster e-literacy. They should be given a training on the practical use of technology in public diplomatic missions including quarantine procedures, investments, and consular affairs during the COVID-19 period.

Diplomats should adopt their role with the new communication systems

Diplomats should abandon their traditional role in diplomacy and they should embrace the new communication tools to maintain public affairs through digital diplomatic procedures. Thus, they should be more familiarized with using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram in handling public diplomatic missions from their host country offices to limit physical movements and contaminations during the pandemic. In this matter, above mentioned social media training will be important to increase e-literacy of diplomats in transforming their traditional role to the digitalization of public diplomacy.

Introducing a consistent official website for all consular affairs

Introducing consistent official website for consular matters will reduce the physical use of documents and it may help to limit the physical presence of

public service providers in the airports and visa offices. "Contact Sri Lanka Portal" launched on 26 March 2020 will be a progressive approach towards public service delivery via digital diplomacy. This was initiated by Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry and the Information & Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA) for overseas Sri Lankans as a diplomatic and consular solution during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introducing social media pages for embassies and high commissions

Following the footsteps of other countries who maintain social media pages like Facebook and Twitter, the Sri Lankan government might urge all the embassies and high commissions to create their own social media pages at a low cost to coordinate and manage their day-to-day diplomatic and consular affairs. During the COVID-19 period in Sri Lanka, people could have easy access to the information and solutions to their consular matters at digital presence.

Carrying out social media campaigns which cover ongoing public diplomatic missions

Sri Lanka is now carrying out a number of public diplomatic missions with several countries.

These ongoing public diplomatic missions could be operated through social media campaigns by using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and You Tube to increase the participation of foreign and national public in diplomacy. This kind of missions may sustain international relations with particular countries through the digitalization of public diplomacy especially during COVID-19 pandemic.

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY MID-CAREER ACADEMICS IN THE DISCIPLINE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

G.T. Madhubhashini[1]

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by the mid- career academics in the discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences in the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in achieving the professional goals using the Motivational System Theory (MST). Therefore, the in-depth interviews were conducted with nine mid-career academics in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Open university of Sri Lanka (purposive sampling). The qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The results show that the challenges and opportunities occurred due to personal factors such as skills, motivation, biological reasons, and institutional factors such as working culture, practices, traditions and customs, supportive mechanism, norms and values, training and resources. Therefore, the responsible authorities should facilitate the mid-career academics to achieve the goals in research, teaching, administrative work and national development by providing the required resources, facilities, opportunities, guidance, training and creating a staff and student friendly working environment within the institution.

Key words: *Challenges, Opportunities, Mid-career academics, Open Distance Learning, Humanities and Social Sciences*

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INTRODUCTION

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is one of the state universities that promotes ODL to empower the heterogenous communities throughout the country. In other words, the OUSL is the only state university which provides the ODL mechanism for both local and international students. OUSL has more than 40000 student population with a strong regional and study centre network. According to the University Grants Commissions' (UGC) ranking, the OUSL is ranked among the top 10 universities in Sri Lanka.

The OUSL is also one of the three universities included in U-Multirank for Sri Lanka. Five indicators such as research, teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement are used to measure the university multi ranking. When it comes to international orientation, two 'A' (very good) scores were given, but when it comes to research, knowledge transfer and teaching and learning indicators, mostly D and E grades were given to the OUSL (Multirank Newsletter, 2020). As far as the research indicator is concerned, citations, publications of individual academics are also considered to measure the quality of research. Graduation rate, on time graduation, unemployment of students are the criteria for teaching and learning indicator while knowledge transfer indicator is calculated by patents, innovations, industry collaboration etc. This shows that there is a gap specially in research, teaching and learning and knowledge transfer by the OUSL academics.

When it comes to Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Sri Lanka celebrates the centenary of Humanities and Social Sciences education in 2021. Gamage (2005) notes that as far as the ranking of HSS faculty by discipline is concerned, among the disciplines in HSS, English scored 22 out of 30 and 15 for Political science and Sociology, 14 for Economics, 13 for Language and Linguistics etc. The OUSL has scored 12 out of 30 while the other universities scored the higher marks under ranking of HSS faculty by university. The ranking is done based on three indicators such as the qualification score, academic rank score and publication score. Specially the mid-career academics who specialise in Humanities and Social Sciences face some challenges even though the future of HSS education is mainly depended on them. Furthermore, it is important to encourage mid-career academics

in the discipline of HSS for gaining their higher education qualifications, research and publications.

The results show that the performance of the OUSL is low compared to the other universities when it comes to the discipline of HSS. In this context, the problem is 'what are the opportunities and challenges faced by mid-career academics in the discipline of HSS in the context of ODL?' The main purpose of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by mid-career academics in the HSS in the context of ODL using the Motivational System Theory (MST).

LITERATURE REVIEW

ODL MECHANISM AT THE OUSL

The OUSL is the premier ODL university in Sri Lanka with forty years of experience. The OUSL was established in 1980 under Universities Act No.16 of 1978 which also comes under the purview of University Grants Commission (UGC), as same as the other fifteen state universities. There are mainly six faculties in the university, namely, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering Technology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences and Faculty of

Management. The ODL is mainly operated through the Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) and Regional Educational Services (RES) with support of other supportive centres and divisions in the university.

The OUSL has a strong regional and study center network which facilitates the heterogenous student population including the marginalised community throughout the country with ODL mechanisms. Vidanapathirana & Gamini (2009) also state that the main purpose of expanding the outreach of educational opportunities is to limit the social, economic, cultural and language barriers of the heterogenous student population.

The ODL is a flexible and feasible way of learning with the advancement of technology. Jayathilleke and Kulasekara (2020) note that, the OUSL has implemented several technological adoptions to the ODL through Generations of Distance Education (GDE). In the early stage, there was a lack of direct learner interaction and reaching was done using single technology. Education Technology (ET) division was established (currently known as CETMe) to facilitate the course development and audio-visual productions. Gradually, Interactive Multimedia (IMM) and online

courses were introduced to facilitate the ODL at the OUSL. The OUSL has introduced a flexible electronic database and a computerized record system to facilitate both students and teachers for the registration, exam related matters, library services etc.

Both students and teachers are the main beneficiaries of the ODL at the OUSL. Vidanapathirana and Gamini (2009) note that the individual factors, social factors and institutional factors make a significant impact on the performance of students in the context of ODL. Hill (2009) also notes that the individual factors, social factors and institutional factors may limit a learner's ability to succeed. Hill (2009) further states that there are several challenges in the ODL faced by the students. These are psychological factors such as lack of motivational skills and lack of understanding of ODL and personal factors such as work-related challenges, financial difficulties, family responsibilities, time related concerns and institutional factors such as strikes and challenges to schedules, facilities and resources, lack of communication and contacts, inadequate support services, policies and practices.

Likewise, several researches have been conducted to find out various issues connected to the ODL system and learners. But there is a gap concerning the teachers' perception or various opportunities and challenges faced by teachers in the context of ODL, and the present study aims to fill this gap. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by mid-career academics in the discipline of HSS in the context of ODL using the Motivational System Theory (MST). Further, there is a dearth of research on mid-career academics specialised in Humanities and Social Sciences in the context of ODL.

2.2 HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE (HSS) EDUCATION

The higher education has become an important theme in the knowledge economy according to the 2030 agenda on Sustainable Development Goals 2. This shows that the higher education sector plays a vital role in the socio-economic development in a country. According to the World Social Science Report 2013, published by UNESCO, Humanities and Social Science education is vital to the higher education since the discipline of HSS contributes to a harmonious and well-arranged society at the local and international levels. In

other words, the discipline of HSS also supports to maintain healthier human relationships and emotional intelligence in order to have a well-arranged society. Subject areas like Psychology, Economics, Education, Sociology, Law, Political science, Geography, Media and Communication etc. come under the purview of Social Sciences, while Arts, History, Archaeology, Languages, Literature, philosophy, Ethics and Religion, performing arts etc. are under Humanities.

As far as the HSS education in the higher education in Sri Lanka is concerned, it has a long history. Prof. KNO Dharmadasa, the national representative for UGC standing committee on Humanities and Social Sciences has stated that the university education in HSS in Sri Lanka started in 1921 with the establishment of the Ceylon University College and a large number of graduates have been produced over the years. But still there are some issues connected to the discipline of HSS such as the quality of the graduates, the relevance of the subject they study and the employability prospects of these graduates. Some key areas such as admission to the Arts courses, the quality assurance of teaching and examination programmes, possibilities of pooling teaching and course

content, recruitment of teaching staff, promotional schemes, research, postgraduate programmes and external examinations etc. are also connected with the quality of the HSS education in the national university system. Sri Lanka celebrates the hundred years of Humanities and Social Sciences education in 2021. Therefore, the centenary celebration of university level education in HSS is organized by the UGC towards the end of 2021. Hence, it is timely to assess the development of university education- a historical perspective, the present status of HSS studies and plans for future developments in this centenary year (Meeting minutes of UGC standing committee on Humanities and Social Sciences, March 2021).

As far as the HSS education at the Open university of Sri Lanka is concerned, the OUSL only had two boards of study at the early stage: Humanities and Social Sciences and Management, Science and Technology (Kotelawele & Samarasundara, 1987). This shows that the HSS education has been introduced to the university at the initial stage. In 1990, HSS was recognized as a separate faculty at the OUSL. Currently there are four departments under the Faculty of HSS: Social Studies, Language studies, Legal studies and English Language Teaching.

The Faculty of HSS caters to more than 10,000 students in the programmes ranging from foundation level to postgraduate degree level under the four departments. The Department of Social Studies offers a range of programmes through the ODL mechanism covering disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology, Politics and International Relations, Economics, Communication Studies, Youth Studies etc. The Department of Language Studies offers programmes specialising English, Teaching, Literature, Korean, Tamil and Sinhala languages while the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) mainly focuses on English Language Skills and Teaching. The Department of Legal Studies mainly offers the study programmes specialising a wide area of law. The mission of the faculty is to empower the students with the HSS education through the ODL mechanism, "The Faculty is dedicated to employing the Open Distance Learning mode to provide quality educational opportunities for adult learners for professional and personal advancement and excellence in scholarship and researching in contemporary disciplines in Humanities and Social Science" (The prospectus of faculty of HSS, 2019: 3).

As far as the mission of the faculty is concerned, it shows that, the mode of the course delivery of HSS education at the OUSL is different compared to the other fourteen state universities in the country. In this context, the role of the academics at the Faculty of HSS at the OUSL is also different from the academics at the other conventional universities. As per guidelines given in the norms of teachers at the OUSL, academics should develop the course materials, online courses and supplementary materials such as reading materials, audio visual materials etc. apart from research, teaching, academic administrative work and the national development. These conditions and requirements are also applicable to the annual increment allowance and the promotions of the academics at the OUSL. Therefore, it is understood that the role, responsibilities and workload of the academics in the ODL are different from those of the academics attached to the conventional universities.

In this context, the Motivational System Theory (MST) is used to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by the mid-career academics in the discipline of HSS in the context of ODL by considering the main components of MST like personal factors such as motivation, skills, biological

factors and institutional factors such as responsive environment. "MST theory explains that the achievement and competence are the results of a motivated, skilful,

and biologically capable person interacting with a responsive environment" (Ford, 1992: 70). A formula is given to explain the MST theory as follows.

Achievement/ Goal = $\dfrac{(\text{Motivation x Skill})}{\text{Biological}}$ x Responsive environment

Therefore, this study expects to examine the challenges and opportunities connected with the personal factors such as skills, motivation, biological reasons and

institutional factors such as working culture, supportive environment, norms and values. The following figure explains the conceptual framework of this study based on the MST theory
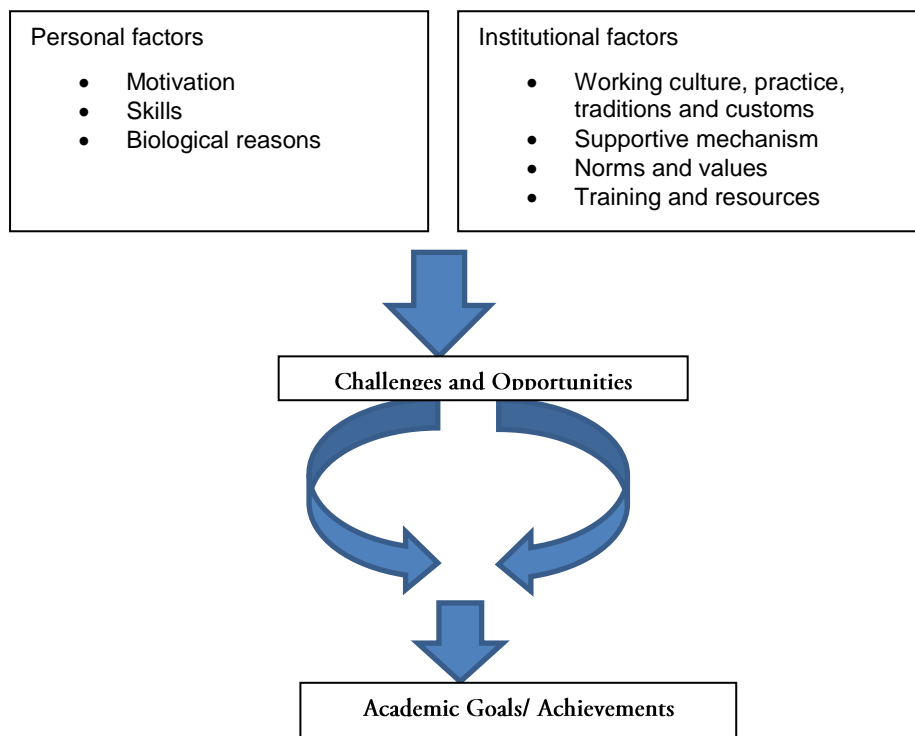

Figure 1- The challenges and opportunities at the personal and institutional levels

This figure shows that the personal and institutional factors have an impact on the achievements of academics. In other words, the challenges and opportunities occur in achieving the career goals of academics due to institutional and personal factors. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and opportunities in achieving goals of academics in the profession.

3.0 RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach to obtain data using interview method. Gill et al (2008) note that interviews provide a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon. In other words, the detailed insights of a particular subject or an area can be collected from individual participants using interview method. This method is basically appropriate for exploring sensitive or personal topics which cannot be discussed in a group environment. Therefore, the interview method was used to collect the detailed and personal data from individual academics on the given topic.

The samples were selected from the Faculty of HSS at the OUSL. The faculty consists of four departments integrating a wide range of HSS disciplines as mentioned in the previous section.

It was found at the programme reviews which were conducted in 2019 that there are some challenges and opportunities in the profession of the mid-career academics attached to the faculty. In this context, this study was conducted to examine the challenges and opportunities of the academics in achieving their goals and achievements in the professional career. According to the US office of personal management, a midcareer professional is someone in 35 to 40 years with more than 10 years of professional experience. According to the criteria given in the definition, nine academics were selected for the study. Therefore, the interviews were conducted with all nine mid-career academics in the Faculty of HSS (purposive sampling). The location and the samples of the study were selected based on the above-mentioned criteria, statistics, facts and justifications to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by the academics in achieving the goals in the professional career.

The personal interviews were formally conducted with the academics. Mostly open-ended questions were asked to get critical, insightful and informative data on the given issue/ topic. The questions were developed under four sections: Research and publications, academic

administrative work, teaching and national development as the academics have to play a major role in these four important areas. The data were collected in the early May 2021.The qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Some limitations are caused in the study due to some geographical and subjective reasons. The academies were only selected from the Faculty of HSS at the OUSL since the study was carried out specialising HSS education in the context of ODL. The mid- career academics were only selected for this research. But the population and sample size can be expanded to find more practical findings/ results in a future study in a systematic and methodical manner.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the original findings of this study, it is important to identify the demographic details of the respondents. The demographic details are presented in the following table.

Table 1 Demographic details of mid-career academics

Gender	Position and Grade	Department				Qualifications	Age
F M	Senior Lecturer	Social DELT	English	Law		PHD Masters	
	G-I G II						
7 2	1 8	4	2	3	-	1 8	35-40

This shows that Female academic population is higher than male academics. Vithanage and Arachchige (2020) note that the female academics are more successful in balancing their work and family life compared to male academics. When it comes to Humanities and Social Sciences also, female representation is quite high compared to the other disciplines. As far as the position and the grade are concerned, the majority are in the post of senior lecturer, but only one academic is in grade 1 position.

The challenges and opportunities at the personal and institutional levels were analysed under four

main responsibilities and duties of academics such as research, teaching, academic administrative work and national development in order to achieve the purpose and to answer the main problem of the study. Personal factors such as motivation, skills and biological reasons and institutional factors such as working culture, practices traditions and customs, supportive mechanism, norms and values, training and resources as mentioned in the MST theory are highlighted in the following table to find out the challenges and opportunities under each component. The major findings / results are summarized in the table.

Table 2 The challenges and opportunities at the personal and institutional levels

Department/ Discipline	Key responsibilities	Challenges	Opportunities
Departments - Social studies, Legal Studies, English Language Teaching, Language Disciplines- Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Communication, Youth studies, Law, English Language, English Teaching)	1.Research and Publications	**Institutional** -No time for research as more time spent for admin work in the department, lack of reading material/ journals, lack of time for extra reading/library hours, difficulty in getting funding approved to attend conferences abroad, Establishments division delays, no training in writing for high standard journals, No support from seniors for research work (**No Supportive mechanism and research culture, lack of training and resources**)	**Institutional** - Space for collaborative research, available conferences, journals, funds and Research supervision (**Supportive mechanism**) **Personal**- Interest to carry out research work (**Motivation**)

		Lack of opportunities to work with the colleagues and travelling issues (unique to regional lecturers)	
		Personal – No motivation due to family commitments (Less **motivation**) and health issues (**Biological**)	
	2.Academic administrative work	**Institutional-** Constant involvement in various issues, Continuous nature of unresolved issues, Less support or accountability of other supportive admin units, less support from subordinate staff and not enough staff to handle admin work,	**Institutional** - Improves knowledge in admin work, ability to improve team work spirit, get to know different personalities, improve problem solving and other technical knowledge (**Working culture, traditions and customs, Supportive mechanism**)

		difficult to manage huge number of students, there is no proper training for young academics for administrative works at the beginning, High administrative workload compared to the conventional universities (**No supportive Working culture, traditions and customs, Supportive mechanism, Norms and values, Training and resources**) Heavy administrative workload of all the programmes and courses offered by the department (only for regional academics)	Personal-------

| | 3. Teaching | **Personal-** -----

 Institutional -Less face-to-face sessions, less student-teacher attraction, lack of knowledge of preparing some ODL materials which are considered as a requirement in OUSL teaching. lack of resources and technical equipment, (**no supportive working culture, traditions and customs, Supportive mechanism, norms and values, training and resources**) | **Personal** - enhances subject knowledge and application skills and learn from the experiences, self-satisfaction as a teacher (**skills and motivation**)

 Institutional- OUSL teaching method requires to prepare ODL study materials which will provide an opportunity to learn new technology. (**Working culture and practices**) |
| | 4.National Development | **Personal---------**
 Institutional: No sufficient opportunities, experience and guidance, | **Personal**-Possess the motivation to contribute towards the national development whenever get |

		Personal -personal contact required Lack of opportunities to work with the colleagues and travelling issues (unique to regional lecturers) (**No supportive working culture, traditions and customs, Supportive mechanism, norms and values, training and resources)**	a chance. Voluntary and open application/ opportunities for some work (**motivation**) **Institutional** ------

The findings show that only several areas under the discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences such as Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Communication, Youth studies, Law, English Language, English Teaching are covered by the Faculty of HSS at the OUSL. The results also show that the mid-career academics in HSS discipline attached to all three departments face the common challenges in achieving the goals in four main pillars such as research, academic administrative work, teaching and national development in the context of ODL. The two academics attached to the regional centres face some different challenges such as lack of opportunities to work with the colleagues in the main campus and travelling issues.

The results show that there are limitations in engaging in research, teaching, national development and administrative work. An academic attached to a regional center emphasized that "Mostly the academics attached to the

regional centers outside Colombo have to look after all the administrative workload connected to the courses and programmes offered by the department. Sometimes it is challenging to work with the administrative staff in the centers and visiting academics. But unlike the Faculty of HSS, in the other faculties such as Engineering Technology and Natural Sciences, more permanent and administrative staff are available. Due to travelling issues, we miss some events/ activities in the main campus as well as the opportunities in the national development sector". This shows that there are some specific personal and institutional issues for the academics attached to the regional centers in the ODL mechanism. The MST theory, when applied to this particular context shows that the academics have positive motivation as well as individual skills to do research and participate in national development, but the working culture practices and lack of supportive mechanism within the Faculty of HSS constrain them in achieving the professional goals.

As far as the challenges in research and publications are concerned, it was specially highlighted that academics do not have time or motivation to engage in research due to the heavy administrative workload in the department. There is no adequate time for reading or applying for the research fund/ grant or attend the conferences etc. The interview results show that compared to the conventional universities, the academics in the ODL system are heavily engaged in administrative work that limit the research training and engagement required for academics. An academic highlighted that "We are demotivated to engage in research due to various institutional factors such as heavy administrative workload, delays at the establishment division, getting funding approval to attend conferences to carry out research, lack of guidance from seniors and unavailability of high standard journals and less training in doing research and writing to journals etc". Due to personal reasons such as family commitments and health issues, the academics are not motivated to do research, and only give priority to the assigned administrative and teaching responsibilities. Compared to the number of publications made by academics attached to the Faculty of Engineering Technology and Faculty of Natural Sciences, HSS academics are far behind in research publications. All nine academics have highlighted the same challenges faced in doing research. But there are some opportunities for supervision, collaborative research, journals,

conferences, funds available at the local and international levels for the academics.

The findings show that due to above mentioned personal and institutional factors, the mid-career academics have published only 3-10 research publications though all of them have been working for the institution for more than 10 years. The results also show that there is only one academic who has obtained the PhD qualification and the others still have master's qualification while there are four PhDs and more than 20 publications and innovations introduced by the mid-career academics attached to the Faculty of Engineering according to the Annual Research Report of OUSL in 2019. The best OUSL research awards in 2019 were obtained by the academics attached to the Faculty of Engineering Technology and Faculty of Natural Sciences and two mid-career academics at the Faculty of Science and one at the Faculty of Engineering Technology were also among these awardees (OUSL Open Quarterly Newsletters in 2019 and 2020). This shows that compared to the other disciplines, the performances of the HSS mid-career academics in research publications are not up to the satisfactory level. It is also discussed that the academics in HSS are not qualified to apply for

the promotions due to lack of engagement in research, less publications and PhD training. But all the academics emphasized that still they have self-motivation to do research if the time and workload can be systematically managed with the institutional support and assistance.

As explained in the previous paragraph, the administrative work load has become an unnecessary burden for the academics. The findings show that there are some challenges in administrative work such as constant involvement in various admin issues, continuous nature of unresolved issues, less support or accountability of other supportive administrative units, less support from subordinate staff and insufficient staff to handle administrative work, difficulty to manage huge number of students, and no proper training for young academics for administrative work at the beginning. It is also highlighted that the administrative workload is high in the ODL compared to the conventional universities. But the most important point is that some skills, experiences and competencies are improved by the academics by engaging in assigned administrative work. An academic stated that "Admin work has become a burden for mid-career academics. Moreover, it is really challenging in finding time for

research due to heavy administrative workload. But fortunately, admin work helps us improve the leadership skills, decision making skills, team work spirit, problem solving and technical knowledge, get to know different personalities etc. One of the other advantages is the opportunity to use English as the official language in academic and administrative work at the faculty though many arts graduates and academics mostly use their mother tongue -Sinhala or Tamil language".

Therefore, the results show that it is a good opportunity for academics attached to the HSS to improve their English proficiency by engaging in administrative work, research, teaching etc. as seven academics out of nine have also done the secondary and undergraduate studies in Sinhala medium. Zuhairi et al (2019) also note that the academics at the OUSL face various challenges with their workload in online teaching and administrative work. Mill (2009) also states that the OUSL teachers face a number of difficulties such as lack of necessary resources, and support services, but still the teachers are passionate about their duties and responsibilities to help the learners.

When it comes to teaching, the challenges and opportunities are

identified at the personal and institutional levels. An academic stated that "There are some challenges such as less interaction with the students due to limited face-to-face day school sessions, lack of resources and technical equipment and facilities such as unstable internet connection, and lack of knowledge of preparing some ODL materials which are considered as a requirement in OUSL teaching". Creating multimedia audios and videos is limited by the academics at the Faculty of HSS compared to the academics in the Faculty of Engineering Technology and Faculty of Natural Sciences. Some opportunities of institutional practices are also identified such as an opportunity to learn new technology and course material development since the OUSL teaching method requires one to prepare ODL study materials and course modules. At the personal level also, the academics have self-satisfaction in teaching while enhancing the subject knowledge, making them aware of the contemporary issues and applying knowledge into practice. The best online course awards in 2018 and 2019 were obtained by the academics attached to the Faculty of Natural Sciences (OUSL Open Quarterly Newsletters in 2019 and 2020). Jayathileka and Kulasekara (2020) note that though the new technologies are introduced to

study material and IMM development, still some academics are not motivated due to various personal and institutional factors.

This shows that the HSS academics are demotivated compared to the academics in the other faculties toward the new technology. Therefore, it is required to improve their skills related to course material development and teaching with the support of a systematic mechanism at the institutional level. But the teachers at the OUSL still apply new technological innovations, devices and tools to have an effective teaching and learning mechanism. "The university teachers are practicing innovative teaching and learning practices such as combining and using the other social media and advance platforms like WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, emails, and e-learn platform to share the zoom links and ppt presentations etc. and conduct Q and A sessions, classroom discussions." (Madhubhashini, 2021, 36)

As far as the national development component is concerned, the academics highlighted that sufficient opportunities, experience and guidance are not available for them to participate in national development. An academic said that "The seniors only get these opportunities to participate in national development and young academics do not easily receive these opportunities. Some academics find these opportunities through their personal contacts or applying for these opportunities officially based on the personal interest. Compared to disciplines like Engineering, Sciences, Education, Management, there are some limited opportunities for discipline of HSS". This shows that the institutional support is not adequate for academics to find the opportunities as well as there are some limited opportunities at the national level for the academics in the discipline of HSS.

CONCLUSION

The Motivational System Theory (MST) is used to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by the mid-career academics in the discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences in the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in achieving their professional goals. Therefore, the results show that there are various opportunities and challenges faced by mid-career academics in HSS in the context of ODL system due to some personal and institutional factors. Moreover, the challenges and opportunities occurred due to personal factors such as skills, motivation, biological reasons etc. and institutional factors such as

working culture, practices, traditions and customs, supportive mechanism, norms and values, training and resources, according to the MST theory. The challenges and opportunities at the personal and institutional levels are examined under four main responsibilities and duties of academics such as research, teaching, academic administrative work and national development.

As far as the results are concerned, there are some specific personal and institutional issues for the academics attached to the regional centres outside Colombo in the ODL mechanism. Therefore, there should be a proper mechanism to facilitate them to engage in collaborative research, national development and establish a supportive working environment in the regional centres. Among the other duties and responsibilities, the academics are over-burdened with the administrative work that limit their time and capacity to engage in research and teaching. But the results show that by engaging in administrative work, the OUSL academics have improved some skills such as leadership skills, decision making skills, team work spirit, English language skills, problem solving and another technical knowledge, get to know different personalities etc. compared to the academics in the conventional universities.

When it comes to teaching, though the face-to-face interaction between the teacher and student is limited, the IMM and course material development are unique to OUSL academics compared to the other academics.

It is shown that the academics still have the positive motivation as well as the skills individually to do research, participate in national development and teaching though the working culture, practices and discouraging environment within the institution limit them in achieving the professional goals according to the MST theory. On the other hand, compared to the disciplines like Engineering, and Sciences, the academics in HSS show less performance in engaging in research publications, national development, material development and teaching. Therefore, the responsible authorities should facilitate the mid-career academics in the discipline of HSS to achieve the goals in research, teaching, administrative and national development by providing the required resources, facilities, opportunities, guidance, training and creating a staff and student friendly working environment within the institution. Within this supportive and systematic working environment, the academics will be able to achieve the goals in the professional career. Some new

areas under the discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences can also be introduced by the departments at the Faculty of HSS, once the supportive and systematic working environment is created for the academics.

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USING ELEARN FACILITIES IN EDUCATION DURING A PANDEMIC – REFLECTIONS OF UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The COVID 19 pandemic transformed many aspects around us including human lifestyle, education and overall functioning of economies around the world. Stakeholders in education, most importantly, students and teachers, had to explore novel ways to disseminate knowledge as the global pandemic forced schools and universities to close down. This posed many challenges for students as well as for teachers forcing them to adapt to new contexts. Thus students in particular, had to engage in their studies using ICT tools/facilities and with very minimal (or no) physical contact sessions. The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges/opportunities experienced by a group of undergraduates when learning through Elearn facilities. The Technology Accepted Model (TAM) was used to form the theoretical frame of the study.

Lack of training at the initial stage, poor infrastructure, poor access to internet facilities and Income and social disparities stood as the main challenges experienced by students when they used the Elearn platform in this study. Cost effectiveness, flexibility and skill development and confidence are the main opportunities that students can obtain through Elearn. However, many students were of the view that Elearn facilities enabled them to continue with their studies without long delays. This study suggests that students should have proper infrastructure and be given proper awareness and training on these different online learning tools before commencing studies. Therefore, although internet-based learning is useful, it is hereby shown that this prospect can be considered for future endeavors in designing programmes for the students in higher education. However, government and institutional support is fundamental for the effective implementation of the Elearn facility for the undergraduates

Key words: *Elearn; ICT; OUSL; challenges; opportunities;*

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The COVID 19 pandemic has transformed many aspects of humanity. The ease of travel and freedom that many of us enjoyed cannot be seen in the present context. There is an increasing amount of emphasis on new ways of embarking knowledge mainly through online teaching-learning platforms as many schools and even higher education institutes remain closed. Since prolonged closure negatively affects academic activities and long-term goals of students, universities in Sri Lanka have chosen to go 'online' as a crisis response and conduct teaching as well as assessments through various online platforms (ADB, 2020). At first, this created many challenges to universities as well as to the students but eventually a majority adapted to the situation as it was the best solution available to continue education. Therefore, even education had to be transformed to new dimensions so that knowledge acquisition is uninterrupted.

Online learning is the use of internet and other important technologies to develop material for education purposes, instructional delivery and management of programmes (Fry, 2001). Platforms like ZOOM, MS Teams, Elearn Learning Management System are few such technologies employed by education institutions and universities to engage in online learning. Studies have shown that for online learning to become effective and efficient, instructors, students and institutions need to have a sound understanding of the benefits and limitations of such online learning windows. Of course, many opportunities can be identified in employing online learning since it provides a good platform for the students to engage in their studies in a timely manner. Yet in developing countries like Sri Lanka, students may face certain challenges when engaging in online learning due to specific constraints both at the personal as well as institutional level. Therefore, exploring such constraints and opportunities in online learning is the primary focus of the present study.

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is the only premier higher education institution devoted to distance education in Sri Lanka. OUSL uses the Open and Distance Learning method (ODL) to carry out academic programmes. ODL is accessible to anyone, living anywhere and at any time. Therefore, OUSL study programmes employ different delivery modes to offer its courses.

Few such examples are, traditional, blended and online.

This study focuses on the challenges and opportunities experienced by a group of undergraduates following a compulsory traditional course using Elearn facilities. In the BA Degree in Social Sciences programme, some courses are conducted in blended mode (using both the Elearn platform and face to face sessions) and some courses are conducted in the traditional mode (such as face to face interactive sessions and submitting assignments by hand or by post). Due to the pandemic situation and closure of universities, the OUSL decided to offer all the courses using the online learning platform (Elearn). In doing so, the lectures were conducted using ZOOM, and assessments, other academic correspondence was done on the Elearn platform. Lesson material and learning resources were also shared through this platform.

It is an accepted fact that online learning is one of the greatest achievements in today's education, yielding advantages to both students as well as the teachers (Norman, 2016). Countries have been using this new technology even before the outbreak of COVID 19 but its validity became more prominent during the past few months. Even in Sri Lanka,

universities have been engaged in online teaching to some extent but due to the pandemic, almost all the universities opted to go online to continue academic activities. In a developing country like Sri Lanka, adopting new technology may not be easy for everyone and students and teachers alike tend to face certain difficulties in this process. According to Masrom (2007) there can be social, personal, technical and institutional factors significantly affecting the usage and familiarity with the new system. Such factors may hinder the fair, continuous and optimum usage of online facilities by the students. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the gaps in online learning of undergraduates.

In this context this study seeks to fulfill the following research objectives.

Primary objectives

Identify the constraints experienced through online learning by a group of undergraduates at OUSL;

Identify the opportunities experienced through online learning by a group of undergraduates at OUSL

Specific objective

Provide recommendations to further enhance the online learning experience of Undergraduates at OUSL.

The researchers randomly selected a traditional course offered in the BA Degree in Social Sciences programme and data was collected via an online questionnaire and through email communications. There are around 140 students in the sample of this study, out of which 98 students responded to the online questionnaire reflecting their experiences in online learning. Apart from that, around 33 email responses were also considered in recording the students' experiences. These written reflections were gathered and analyzed using the thematic analysis approach, an emerging technique to analyze qualitative/descriptive data. In the data analysis and research findings section, such results will be further discussed and presented.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study is mainly based on the Elearning facilities provided for the undergraduates in continuing their academic activities during a pandemic situation. Also it examined the opportunities and challenges faced by the students, when they were adapted to the Elearning environment. Since this study is related to the use of technology and technology acceptance by the undergraduates, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM1) was extended to form the theoretical frame of the study considering the applicability, similarity and the relevance of the above situation.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is one of the most frequently used models for researches into new information technology acceptance and a pioneering theory which predicts the applications usage due to perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Masrom, 2007). This model forms the theoretical base for this study as it will be predicting the usage of online learning by the students. Using this model, studies have shown to what extent people accept new technology and whether they have accepted it at all. Elearning is drawing more attention these days due to the pandemic and disturbances in the education sector. Therefore, this study will discuss some of these theoretical debates in deciding whether students have accepted innovations in traditional learning and identify factors that have become significant in making them to either accept or reject the usage of

new technology in an online teaching-learning environment.

In this model, the major determinants are perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PUOF), (Refer Figure 1).
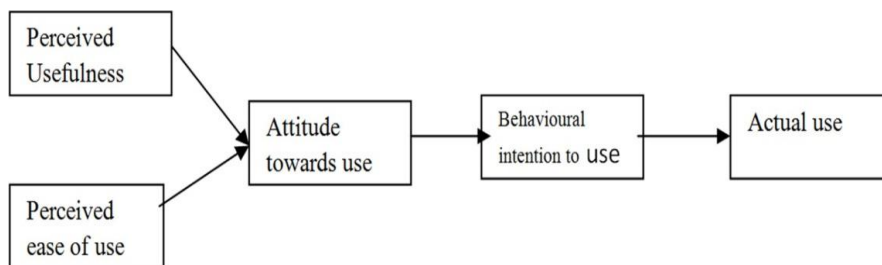
Figure 1. The original technology acceptance model TAM (Davis, 1989)

PU means the level to which a person assumes that using a particular system would enhance his or her performance and PEOU is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort. Scholars have stated that these two factors significantly influence to form the attitude towards technology use. (Agarwal & Prasad, 1999; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Some researchers indicate that ease of use has the greatest effect on acceptance. (Ma & Liu, 2004; Vander Heijden, et al., 2003). It has been proven that the easier and more effortless a technology is, it is more likely to persuade the users to use such technology. According to Davis, 1989, "Ease of use" is particularly influenced in the early stages of user experience with a technology or system. However, the perception towards the use of technology may change depending on age and gender. Moreover, perception regarding the "ease of use" of technology with proper instructional media forms a positive direction. In this model, perceived ease of use was theorized as a fundamental determinant for the technology user.

In TAM, attitude towards use refers to the user's feelings about using the information technology.On that idea Amoroso and Hunsinger (2009) state that, there is a correlation between perceived usefulness of the Internet and the user's attitude towards using the Internet. Further, they assume that there is a positive correlation between attitudes toward using the Internet and behavioral intention to use.

Finally, actual usage in the model

refers to the amount of time that a user spends in using technology. A study based on information technology usage and adoption found that both perceived usefulness and attitude were related to actual usage (Mao, 2002). It assumes that the level of usefulness tends to have a positive feeling to actual use of technologies.

When conceptualizing TAM towards this study, this model was useful to lay the theoretical foundation to identify the two determinants which effectively associate with each other to formulate attitudes and to intend the behavior towards the actual use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid changes and increased complexity in today's world present new challenges and put new demands on the education system. There has been generally a growing awareness of the necessity to change and improve the existing system towards online learning (Almarabeh et al.2014). The rapid growth of Elearning comes as a result of the integration of technology in education which has been influenced by the advent of the Internet and other Information Technology. Over the last ten years, the use of Elearning has been increasing and has become a system offered by most schools and institutions of higher education all over the world (Forsyth et al.2010). Currently, Elearning is the common term used to describe the various uses of information and communications technologies to enhance learning and teaching using new strategies. The strategies used to do this included developing learning management systems through platforms such as Moodle, including interactive course materials and quizzes on specific topics. These materials included interactive text, videos, lectures, photos and animations. Virtual libraries were often utilized to house such materials. All these activities were initiated in conjunction with traditional teaching strategies such as face-to-face lectures and labs (Frehywot et al.2013).

According to Qureshi et al. (2012) a recent trend observed in higher education is the introduction of Elearning systems to provide students with online access to learning contents. Improving learning outcome has always been a significant motivating factor in educational investigation. In a mixed learning environment where Elearning and traditional face to face class education is combined, there are opportunities to discover the role of technology in improving students' grades. A student's performance is impacted

by many factors such as engagement, self-regulation, peer interaction, tutor's experience and tutors' time involvement with students. Additionally, e-course design factors such as providing personalized learning are urgent necessities for better learning process. It has been found to be convenient and enables students to access educational material with ease. Once the material is developed and uploaded online it has no expiry date and could be utilized anywhere in the world (Allen, 2011). It can facilitate enhanced communication between and among students and lecturers (Mapuva, 2019). It allows learners to access material when needed and study at their own preferred pace without the stress of missing important information (Roy and Raymond, 2005).

However, technologies bring challenges as well and merely the presence of a technology does not guarantee successful implementation. Elearn adoption like any other technology adoption is hampered when there is absence of improved technology in any university system (Almarabeh et al., 2014).

Developing countries are faced with many e learning challenges. The research found out that instructors faced challenges with Elearning implementation, that all

instructors interviewed had little or no experience with online learning and teaching methods and, as a result, lacked confidence in the implementation of Elearning. In fact, very few people have access to computers and the few who have access to the computer do not have knowledge to use it and take full advantage of its use (Forsyth et al.2010). Some of the problems have emanated from the students' lack of confidence to use technology and their interaction with lecturers. Students need to be prepared to adapt to advances in technology, especially for learning and communication purposes (Mapuva, 2019).

There are some barriers such as lack of awareness, lack of quality e-content, inconsistency of contents and methods, unavailability of proficiency, attitudinal hindering, social and cultural obstacles, infrastructural barriers, lack of foreign language proficiency and high level of illiteracy in computing, in addition to obstacles related to integrating Elearning into traditional learning and training systems (Aldowah et al, 2015). Students having low proficiency are not likely to use Elearning because of low confidence in understanding the contents of English written materials (Qureshi et al 2012). The study carried out by Shraim & Khalif (2010) in Palestine found

that most of the respondents felt language was a barrier to Elearning.

The need of students to have personal discussion with lecturer is an important aspect in student satisfaction. However, Elearning often does not provide this kind of interaction, which students can have in traditional education systems. Therefore, a balanced approach should be introduced which includes online sessions as well as face to face learning (Qureshi et al 2012). Sweeney, O'Donoghue, and Whitehead (2004) found similar feelings from their students with important preference for face to face education. However, Elearning becomes helpful in learning and sharing of knowledge and diverse competencies across different geographical proximity.

Further, research found that the existence of new technology does not ensure successful implementation because the use of technology will bring new challenges. Thus, understanding the views and perceptions of users related to the technology requirements is extremely important. It is important to meet the concerns of the students in order to increase the educational perspectives of Elearning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted in this study belongs to inductive reasoning. The primary data was collected through an online questionnaire and email communication/responses of students.

As the sample, the researchers randomly selected a traditional course offered in the BA Degree in Social Sciences programme. Although this course is usually conducted in the traditional mode, due to the pandemic situation, it was delivered using Elearn platform along with online lectures. There are around 140 students in the selected course of the study, out of which 98 students responded to the Elearn based questionnaire reflecting their experiences in online learning. Apart from that, around 33 email responses were also considered in recording the students 'experiences. There the researchers specifically focused on the opportunities and challenges faced by them in using Elearn and their overall experience in online learning.

This study is entirely qualitative and 6-step thematic analysis approach presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) (ReferTable 1) was used for the data analysis.

Table 1 – Six-step thematic analysis procedure – Braun & Clarke (2006)

Phase	Examples of procedure for each step
1. Familiarizing oneself with the data	Transcribing data reading and re-reading; noting down initial codes
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the data-set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for the themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Involved reviewing the themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data-set; generate a thematic 'map'
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme; generation of clear names for each theme
6. Producing the report	Final opportunity for analysis selecting appropriate extracts; discussion of the analysis; relate back to research question or literature; produce report

When analyzing the data, firstly, all the reflections were gathered and accommodated to the data. Next, transcripts were examined by breaking down the text into small units and generated the codes based on the special features of the data. After applying initial coding, twenty-three (23) meaning units were identified under two sections which are challenges and opportunities. Then, the collated codes were put into potential themes and reviewed all the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. In the next stage, themes were clearly defined and named. (Five (05) themes for challenges and three (03) themes for opportunities were named as the themes in this study).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This study identified twenty-three (23) meaning units (codes) and such units are presented under three (03) themes for opportunities and five (05) themes for challenges in Elearning. It is shown in the following thematic map.

Challenges experienced by Undergraduates in using Elearn facilities

Challenges experienced by the students in using Elearn facilities are explained below based on the Challenges thematic map.

Figure 2 – Challenges thematic map

Poor access to internet facilities	✓ Poor signals in mountain areas ✓ Technical barriers ✓ Insufficient data network
Infrastructure related issues	✓ Limited resources at NAC centers (administrative and physical) ✓ Insufficient access to basic equipment ✓ Limited access to NAC centers and internet cafes
Lack of proper training in IT and related skills at the initial stage	✓ Poor language proficiency ✓ Navigation issues ✓ Lack of IT competency among stakeholders
Income and social disparities	✓ Initial cost of accessing online facilities is high
Negative impact on the socialization process	✓ Initial cost of accessing online facilities is high ✓ Interaction based on social media

POOR ACCESS TO INTERNET
FACILITIES

Poor signals in mountain areas

Students mentioned that the geographical location affected their access to internet facilities since those who were in mountain areas had poor signal coverage. Also those who were residing in rural areas did not have enough signals to participate in ZOOM day schools clearly and engage in Elearn platform. This disrupted their continuous engagement in the lectures.

Technical barriers

According to student reflections, there were several technical barriers resulting in poor access to online facilities. Low internet speed and power failure were few of the notable remarks in this regard. Similarly, many students noted that traffic in the Elearn LMS closer to submission deadlines of assignments did not allow them to upload assignments by the given deadline. In such situations students had to make a special request to the course leader/s to make late submissions.

Insufficient data network

Students stated that their data packages did not contain enough capacity to access ZOOM sessions and sometimes they get disconnected many times during the session. This was quite disturbing for the students compelling them to leave the session or watch the recording of the session later.

INFRASTRUCTURE RELATED ISSUES

Limited resources at NAC centers (administrative and physical)

The central campus administers regional and study network all over the country and computer labs (NAC centers) have been set up to allow students to freely access computer facilities and internet facilities. When the academic departments started E based learning due to the pandemic situation, the number of accessing NAC centers of the students have gone up. Especially when submission deadlines come up, a big demand rise in the NAC centers and students have to wait in the queue.

Insufficient access to basic equipment

When all the courses are transformed into online, students have to spend a considerable time online. In this context, if the students have their own computers, it is beneficial for them to engage in education without

distractions. But having a personal computer is a challenging task for the low-income students as the initial cost (buy a computer or a smart phone with a router) for that is comparatively high. Although such situation is a significant issue for the students, any institutional or governmental arrangement has not been introduced yet.

Limited access to NAC centers and internet cafes

Students who do not have personal computers and internet facilities had to face some difficulties when they used internet cafes and university NAC centres. On the one hand, using public places to access internet is unsafe during pandemic situation. On the other hand, students are not allowed to enter the university premises in some periods during pandemic situation. But academic activities were carried out and students were instructed to continue academic activities online.

LACK OF PROPER TRAINING IN IT AND RELATED SKILLS AT THE INITIAL STAGE

Poor language proficiency

Some students mentioned that they did not have enough capacity to understand the content and the instructions in Elearn LMS due certain language issues. In traditional lectures, students are able to clarify the issues with the teachers through face to face interactions, but it is difficult to do so through Elearn.

Navigation issues

Reflections of students stated that on some occasions they are unable to navigate in the Elearn LMS as they are not familiar with the system at the beginning. On such occasions students tend to email relevant staff members or give phone calls inquiring about information which has been already made available in Elearn LMS. This issue is also faced by some matured or elderly students who are not IT savvy and facing difficulties adapting to online learning.

INCOME AND SOCIAL DISPARITIES

Initial cost of accessing online facilities is high

Many students have mentioned that the initial cost borne to engage in online learning is high. Students have to buy a computer / smart phone, suitable data package to access online learning platforms like ZOOM and Elearn. This may not be an easy task for students from low income families, unemployed students or those coming from marginalized communities. Especially during

the pandemic situation many employed students lost their jobs and faced other challenges. So bearing this initial cost was a problem according to the majority views.

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

Less interaction in online learning

According to student views, in the traditional (physical) setting, students interact with each other freely and they interact with the teacher. Yet in online learning this level of interaction is very minimal especially when the student number is high in courses. Sometimes students said that they do not talk at all during a ZOOM lecture and they only type the query in the chat box. Even in Elearn they do not get an opportunity to talk with their peers or the lecturers.

Less social interactions among peers

Due to the transformation to online learning, students are using applications like WhatsApp, Facebook which are creating virtual relationships among students. However, the face to face interaction is important to build effective social relationships. There may be some students who do not use such social media platforms. They will be left out from the communication network and they may not be up to date about certain pieces of information which are quite important to them. This also negatively affects the level of social interaction among the students and distance some from the online learning platforms. Further, this will have a negative impact on the building of social relationships.

Opportunities in using Elearn facilities by Undergraduates

Opportunities experienced by the students in using Elearn facilities are explained below, based on the Opportunities thematic map.

Figure 3 – Opportunities thematic map

Cost effectiveness

- ✓ Zero documentation
- ✓ Cost worthyness
- ✓ Time saving
- ✓ No delay in examination

Skill development and confidence

- ✓ Motivating the learner to study the subject as well as development of computer and internet skills
- ✓ Adapting to Elearn through skill development
- ✓ Build self-knowledge and self-confidence

Flexibility

- ✓ Easy and fast way to communicate
- ✓ Help learners to understand easily and effectively
- ✓ Providing anytime accessible to course materials
- ✓ Equal opportunities to deal with module leaders
- ✓ Demand for the online learning is higher than traditional learning

COST EFFECTIVENESS

➢ **Zero documentation**

Earlier, students had to submit assignments in writing. But when they submit the document via elearn, they do not want to bind, post or handover it to the university. Students stated that it is a waste of paper and time and also it will be a way of polluting the environment. Therefore, it provides an alternative to paper-based training and lowers environmental impact.

More and more universities are making a conscious effort to reduce their carbon footprint as part of their responsibility strategy. Elearning is an effective method that has a lower environmental impact. It offers an alternative to paper-based learning and contributes to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly workplace.

➢ **Cost worthiness**

Most of the students' stated that with the Elearn facility, the cost of doing assignments was zero. Because when they submit an assignment, there were many costs such as travelling, printing (sometimes twice or more), binding, etc. Now with the new technology, they can easily send any assignment even at the last minute.

Next is the travelling cost to attend lectures. It is the biggest burden for them since some students are far from the center1.

➢ **Time saving**

Students noted the following as the time saving factors with Elearn facility.

- No travelling to lectures.

- No need for handing over the assignment to centers.

➢ **No delay in examinations**

Since the examinations were transferred to online platform, there was no delay in any examination. Even the assignments were uploaded to the Elearn platform and students were very satisfied as they were able to finish their academic activities on time.

FLEXIBILITY

➢ **Easy and fast way to communicate**

There are many ways to engage in academic activities through online

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[1] OUSL has regional campuses in 23 districts and each of them is called as a regional or study center.

learning such as receiving instructions, information, notices etc. Therefore, when students have anything to inquire there are multiple ways to get a quick response to their queries.

Students stated that there are delays when receiving communication from the university such as about exam admission, important notices, reminders etc. especially by post. Therefore, many were of the view that through Elearn such communication is received fast and in a timely manner.

Further, students mentioned that through the Elearn platform, they can clarify academic matters and queries regarding assignment submissions and view urgent messages and announcements posted by the lecturers easily and quickly.

➢ **Help learners to understand course content easily and effectively**

Students stated that different technologies included in the Elearn platform helped them to understand the course content. (e.g. videos, PowerPoint presentations and recordings of lectures). Students mentioned that they were able to study on their own by watching such materials.

➢ **Providing anytime accessibility to course materials**

Since the soft copies of course materials are uploaded in Elearn platform, students can access course material at any time and thus, students mentioned that there was no need to carry printed material.

Most of the students are employed fulltime or part-time. They have very limited time and access for studying or attending lectures. But with the above mentioned facilities, they can have easy access if they have an internet and a device.

➢ **Equal opportunities to deal with module leaders**

Before implementing this system, students were able to have the interaction only with the regional lecturers. But since students had a chance to deal with the module leader with the new change, they have mentioned it is a very good opportunity that they received.

➢ **Demand for the online learning is higher than that for traditional learning**

Since the system is very flexible and one can join the session from anywhere, it was mentioned that more students opted to attend

lectures online.

Especially employed students emphasized that they have a very good advantage due to online facility even amidst office work. Because some students had a chance to join sessions even during the office time.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND CONFIDENCE

➢ **Motivating the learner to study the subject as well as development of computer and internet skills**

With this transformation to online learning, students are motivated and encouraged to learn more about the subject while improving their IT skills.

➢ **Other skill development through online learning**

Through online learning, students are able to develop many skills such as effective time management, communication skills, reading and word processing skills etc., apart from basic IT skills. Since the students had to adapt to the online learning environment, even those who were not skilled in IT were exposed to different competencies.

➢ **Build self-knowledge and self-confidence**

Students stated that engaging in online learning built their confidence as they had to study on their own more than in the traditional system. The activities and assessments included in the Elearn platform improve the students' capacity and the subject knowledge whilst training them to be more independent.

DISCUSSION

As stated in the section above, poor access to internet facilities has been pointed out by students as the most affecting factor in online learning. This has also been discovered as an important determinant in identifying student competence in acquiring digital skills. According to a Michigan State University (2018) study, students without proper internet access and relying only on a cellphone to engage in studies were low in digital skills which could last for a lifetime. Also, those who did not have a computer and fast access to internet did not perform well in standardized tests. Another recent study also pointed out that those without proper online facilities were suffering from "digital poverty" and for any technology to become successful most students should be able to access it effectively (McKie, 2020). The same study pointed out that education opportunity should be reachable to all irrespective of their

social status and that no student should be left out to suffer from digital poverty. This becomes quite valid in terms of another vital theme emanating from this study – income and social disparities. According to Ketchell (2020), in South East Asia, lack of internet access has seriously affected thousands of students engaging in online learning and some countries do not have online policies for teaching. Even in a country like Sri Lanka where there are economically vulnerable families who cannot afford to buy computers and necessary infrastructure, this digital divide can acutely be seen as hindering online learning process.

Although the university decided to transform all the courses to the Elearn platform, studies have shown that in a mixed learning environment where Elearning and traditional face to face class education is combined, there are opportunities to discover the role of technology in improving student's grades. Once the material is developed and uploaded online it has no expiry date and could be utilized anywhere in the world (Allen, 2011). This is especially true in the case of OUSL since many employed students benefit from materials uploaded online. It can facilitate enhanced communication between and among students and lecturers

(Mapuva, 2019). It allows learners to access material when needed and study at their own preferred pace without the stress of missing important information (Roy and Raymond, 2005).

According to Anderrson (2008), inadequate infrastructure availability is one of the main challenges affecting Elearning in developing countries. The findings of this study are based on a case study from Sri Lanka. As per Mozelius et al. (2011), although infrastructure is available in most of the urban areas, in rural areas of Sri Lanka the infrastructure needs to be upgraded substantially. So, the digital divide is actually urban-rural in the current context. Even in this study, students reflected that there were shortages in the services they received and also some were not able to fulfill their facility needs. Therefore, inadequate infrastructure has been identified by other studies also as a key barrier in online learning.

According to Link and Marz (2006) students who lack basic computer skills are at a disadvantage in online learning. Even this study shows that those students in the low income families are at a disadvantage since they cannot engage in anytime online learning.

It is well accepted that online

classrooms and platforms provide many opportunities for students. However according to Baylor University (year unknown) online learning can make learners frustrated due to peer isolation and other barriers. Sometimes teachers will have to employ different techniques to keep the students' interest and not make them feel isolated. Irwin and Berge (2006) are also of the view that online interaction, though sounds exciting, can lead to discomfort and anxiety among the participants. Even this study has noted the students' perspective that socialization does not happen in an online learning environment and in that context the traditional classroom set up is preferred.

CONCLUSION

➢ Online learning has greatly transformed education to new heights and in a pandemic situation, countries have immensely benefitted from internet based learning tools. Also Elearn provides a great opportunity for both students as well as education institutions to continue with academic activities despite a global pandemic.

➢ Cost effectiveness, flexibility and skill development and confidence are the three main opportunities in Elearning

identified by this study, and it is evident that this prospect can be considered in future endeavors when designing programmes for the students in higher education.

➢ This study revealed that proper training in IT and other skills are main requirements of learners to achieve the aspirations of online learning.

➢ In order to successfully achieve the targets of online learning, challenges faced by students need to be identified and addressed properly. It is the responsibility of both the government and the institutions to take necessary steps to overcome such challenges since there can be certain constraints affecting developing countries like Sri Lanka.

➢ Necessary infrastructure facility is a basic requirement to effectively implement online learning methods. This is an extremely important condition to be fulfilled even within a non-pandemic context.

➢ Although TAM 1 suggests that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the key dimensions to form attitudes towards technology use, this study proved that

there are some other factors influencing perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use and also necessary initiatives should be taken at the initial stage such as proper training, improving infrastructure, to increase the perceived ease of use to the technology user in the learning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ Training programs should be organized for the learners at the commencement of the programme to give up old ideas and to work together to welcome ICT based learning. This is not only for Covid pandemic situation but also for any other conditions as OUSL is a leading distance education provider in the higher education sector in Sri Lanka.

➢ Quality of the IT based trainings for the learners should be enhanced appropriately. Especially the trainings should be designed to cover the IT based education and the technical knowledge to minimize the queries. This would be helpful for learners to study online effectively and concentrate more on subject related matters.

➢ With OUSL Elearn as the main IT based platform for the learners, contents of the learning resources should be designed incorporating creative techniques such as sound effects, videos, graphics, comic skits and other performance. Training workshops should be organized for teachers as well on designing IT based learning resources creatively and to increase their IT competency level.

➢ From the university level, free access or subsidized data packages for the students should be introduced in collaboration with IT service providers to access Open University Elearn platform and the ZOOM facility.

➢ Physical resources (especially computers) for the main campus and the regional centers should be increased based on the demand of the students to access NAC centers to study without any interruptions.

➢ When expanding online learning facilities at an equitable level, especially during a pandemic time, government should take policy level decisions and intervene to improve the infrastructure requirements since most of the student-reflections in this

study were associated with inadequate infrastructure facilities.

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