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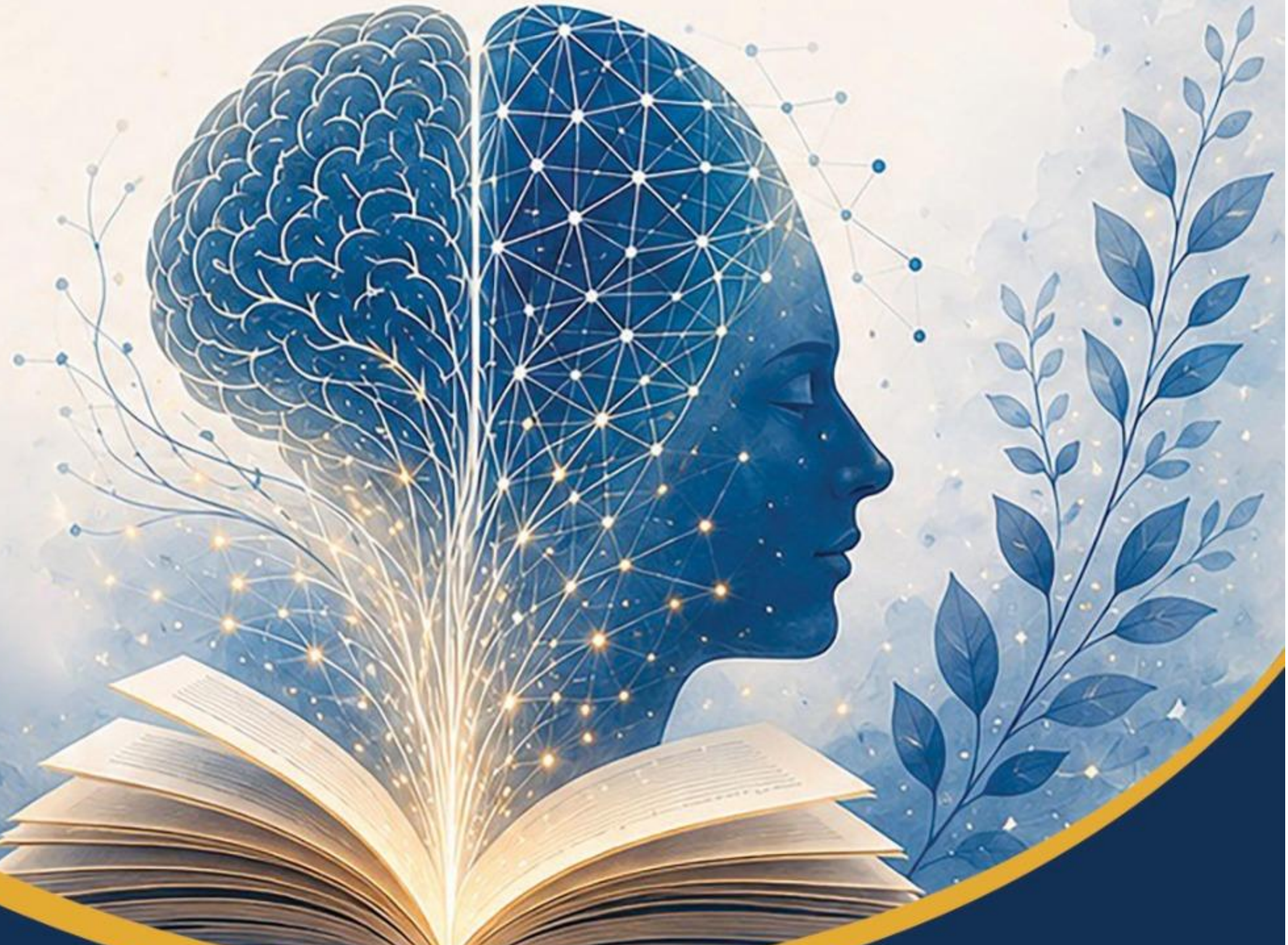

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Editor's Note

It is with great pleasure that I present this volume of the *Eurasian Journal of Education and Psychology*, a scholarly platform dedicated to advancing research and intellectual dialogue in the fields of education and psychology. The journal aims to promote high-quality academic inquiry and provide researchers, educators, psychologists, and practitioners with an avenue to disseminate innovative research findings, theoretical perspectives, and evidence-based practices that contribute to the advancement of knowledge and human development.

Education and psychology are closely interconnected disciplines that play a pivotal role in shaping individuals, communities, and societies. In an era characterized by rapid social, technological, and cultural transformations, scholarly research in these fields is more important than ever. Through the publication of rigorous and impactful studies, the *Eurasian Journal of Education and Psychology* seeks to foster critical thinking, encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, and support the development of effective educational and psychological practices across diverse contexts.

The journal welcomes contributions from a wide range of academic areas, including educational theory and practice, curriculum studies, educational leadership, teacher education, educational technology, developmental psychology, counseling psychology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, mental health, and related interdisciplinary fields. By bringing together diverse scholarly perspectives, we aspire to create a vibrant forum for intellectual exchange and meaningful academic engagement.

Knowledge flourishes when it is shared, examined, and continuously refined through scholarly discourse. The progress of education and psychology depends upon critical inquiry, empirical investigation, and thoughtful reflection. It is our hope that the research published in this journal will contribute to addressing contemporary challenges, informing policy and practice, and enhancing the well-being and educational outcomes of individuals and communities throughout the Eurasian region and beyond.

As this journal continues its academic journey, we remain committed to maintaining high standards of scholarly excellence, ethical research practices, and academic integrity. We encourage researchers and scholars from around the world to contribute their valuable work and participate in the ongoing advancement of education and psychological sciences.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all authors who have contributed their valuable manuscripts to this volume. My heartfelt thanks are also extended to the members of the Editorial Board and the Board of Reviewers for their dedication, expertise, and commitment in ensuring the academic quality of the journal. I am equally grateful to all individuals who have supported the publication process in various capacities and helped make this issue a success.

It is my sincere hope that the *Eurasian Journal of Education and Psychology* will serve as a significant resource for researchers, educators, psychologists, and students, and will continue to contribute meaningfully to the global academic community.

Dr. Padmasiri Ranawakaarachchi
Editor-in-Charge
Eurasian Journal of Education and Psychology

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The Personalities and Emotional Regulation as a Mediator between Childhood Maltreatment and Criminal Behavior

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Abstract: Childhood abuse is a serious topic of both public health and criminology whose relationship has been determined with the negative development, including antisocial and criminal behavior. However, the processes behind psychological processes through which childhood trauma is transformed into future criminal propensity are not well understood. In this study, the mediating role of personality structure and emotional dysregulation is explored in the relationship between abuse when young and tendencies towards criminal behaviors. A cross- sectional, quantitative design was used, in which 50 students (25 male and 25 female) from the university were sampled, and the students were aged 18-25. The questionnaires were the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-Short Form (CTQ-SF), the Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Short Form (DERS-SF), and an Adapted Self-Report Delinquency Scale. Correlation tests indicated that childhood abuse had a strong positive correlation with maladaptive personality traits (high Neuroticism, low Agreeableness, low Conscientiousness), emotional dysregulation, and propensity to crime. Using the Hayes macro on the mediation analysis termed PROCESS, the test results indicated that personality traits, including emotional dysregulation, mediated the abuse-criminality relationship without each other. In addition, a significant sequential mediation was established, according to which childhood abuse was associated with a less stable personality structure, which, in its turn, led to more emotional dysregulation, which, in its turn, predetermined more criminal tendencies. These findings present the importance of a mechanism-based approach. These suggest that the prevention of the criminal outcomes following the victims of abuse should extend beyond the treatment of the trauma symptoms and will also involve the intervention aimed at establishing resilient personalities and central emotion regulation skills. Theoretical contributions to developmental psychopathology and criminology are discussed.

Keywords: Criminal behaviors, emotional dysregulation, Five-Factor Model, childhood abuse, mediation, trauma

1. Introduction

The etiological origins of criminal behaviors are multi-dimensional, interwoven, and a combination of genetic, neurobiological, environmental, and psychological fibers. Childhood maltreatment is among the strongest environmental risk factors that have been determined through decades of studies; a betrayal of the safety and nurturance of healthy development (Gilbert et al., 2009). Epidemiological research invariably shows that the victims of abusive, either physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or neglect, retain a significantly high likelihood of committing antisocial and criminal behaviors in adulthood, adolescence to adult life (Widom, 2017). The given correlation, however, raises a very serious question: how does the experience of early abuse get transduced into the possibility of breaking the social norms and laws? The direct route is not always inevitable or general, which means that there are critical mediating processes that make the risk worse or better.

The significance of understanding these mechanisms lies in the ability to go beyond the descriptive risk factors to be able to inform specific prevention and intervention strategies that work. Two candidate mechanisms, which have attracted large, though frequently concurrent, scholarly interest, are lasting personality organization and emotion regulation deficits. Personality-wise, childhood traumas may interfere with the normative development of the self, which may lead to the development of characteristics of criminality, including high Neuroticism (emotional instability), low Agreeableness (antagonism, callousness), and low Conscientiousness (impulsivity, irresponsibility) (Jones et al., 2011). Such characteristics in expression by the prevailing Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality can constitute a blanket-like dispositional weakness.

At the same time, childhood abuse is one of the main factors in the development of proper emotion regulation systems (Cook et al., 2005). Survivors find it difficult to recognize, process, and regulate extreme emotional states, especially negative affect such as anger, shame, and fear. This is an essential characteristic of most disorders related to trauma, and has been firmly linked to reactive aggression, impulsive decision-making, and drug abuse, all of which are proximal contributors to criminal behaviors (Roberton et al., 2012).

However, there is a need to have a critical integration of theories. It is reasonable to outline that personality and emotional dysregulation may not work in a vacuum of each other, but they are rather dynamically connected in a cascade of development. The abuse in early life can result in instability and antagonism as a personality architecture, which subsequently offers a good breeding ground for chronic emotional dysregulation. This lack of regulation, combined with low constraint, could then directly translate into criminal behaviors as a maladaptive coping mechanism (e.g., to acquire resources, to practice control, or release anger, etc.). This paper hypothesizes that personality and emotional regulation do not just act as independent mediators, but there is a sequence of activities that lead to an understanding of how child victimization leads to behavioral offending in adults.

Thus, this study will explain the precise psychological mechanisms that connect childhood abuse and criminal behaviors by validating a combined mediation model. It will examine whether the relationship can be explained by personality traits and emotional dysregulation separately, and whether these two variables constitute a chain reaction (abuse → personality→ emotional dysregulation → criminal behaviors).

1.1. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The main aim is to test the mediation effects of personality (according to FFM) and emotional self-regulation in the association between childhood maltreatment and self- reported criminal predisposition in non-clinical young adults.

The specific hypotheses are:

H_1: A significant positive correlation will exist between the scores obtained on a scale of childhood abuse and the scores obtained on a scale of criminal propensity.

H_2: Personality traits will mediate the association between childhood abuse and criminal propensity, in that higher Neuroticism, lower Agreeableness, and lower Conscientiousness are personality traits.

H_3: Emotional dysregulation will mediate the association between childhood abuse and criminal propensity.

H_4: A significant sequence pathway of mediation will exist where childhood abuse forecasts a more sensitive personality profile (high N, low A, low C), which subsequently forecasts increased emotional dysregulation, which will further forecast increased criminal propensity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Childhood Abuse and Its Long Shadow

Childhood abuse refers to both acts of commission (commonly referred to as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse) and omission (neglect) that harm or can potentially harm the health, survival, or dignity of a child (World Health Organization, 2020). Its effects do not end in childhood but are a long shade into the lifespan. According to neurobiological studies, chronic stress in sensitive age groups can change the structure and functioning of the brain and especially that of emotion, impulse control, and executive function (Teicher et al., 2016).Psychologically, abuse destroys fundamental schemas concerning the self as worthy and the world as safe, resulting in significant disturbance of attachment and psychopathology.

2.2. Abuse-Criminality Link: Professional Evidence

Childhood maltreatment and subsequent criminality are among the most repeated criminology findings. Prospective studies of such seminal nature as that by Widom (1989) with court-substantiated cases discovered that abused and neglected children were much more likely to be arrested as both juvenile and adult offenders of violent, property, and drug-related offenses than their matched controls. This strong effect is supported by meta-analyses and moderate to strong effect sizes of various forms of offending (Malvaso et al., 2016). Such theoretical frameworks as General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) assume that abuse qualifies as a strong strain that creates negative affect (e.g., anger, frustration), which can be relieved through criminal coping strategies.

2.3. Personality as a Dialectical Vulnerability

The Five-Factor Model Personality is a manifestation of persistence in thinking, feeling, and acting. FM offers a detailed taxonomy under five broad areas: Neuroticism (vs. emotional stability), Extraversion (vs. introversion), Openness (vs. closedness), Agreeableness (vs. antagonism), and Conscientiousness (vs. disinhibition). One of the similar meta-analytic results is that there is a strong relationship between criminal and antisocial behaviors and high Neuroticism, low Agreeableness, and low Conscientiousness (Jones et al., 2011). High Neuroticism is associated with emotional volatility and negative affectivity, low Agreeableness is associated with interpersonal antagonism and callousness, and low Conscientiousness is associated with the deficiency of playfulness, impulsivity, and inability to control oneself. These traits can be interfered with by childhood abuse. An example is that a child can be raised in an abusive environment and learn that the world is dangerous (reducing Agreeableness), his or her emotional state is unpredictable and overwhelming (increasing Neuroticism), and long-term plans are useless (reducing Conscientiousness).

2.4. Emotional Dysregulation as a Process Fundamental

Emotional dysregulation is an inability to police, interfere, and modify the emotional reactions to achieve goal-oriented behaviors (Gratz and Roemer, 2004). It has problems concerning emotional awareness, clarity, acceptance, and the ability to employ effective regulation strategies. This is a form of chronic interpersonal trauma in the form of childhood abuse, which basically introduces interference into the adaptive regulation of emotion learning process. The affective displays of the child can be either penalized or not, and are not necessarily con-regulated by the caregivers. Thus, survivors are more likely to respond in an emotional way, being fearful of the control tempest. It is this dysregulation that is a transdiagnostic element of trauma that relates traumas to a plethora of negative outcomes, such as aggression, substance use, and self-harm behaviors that commonly overlap with criminality (Weiss et al., 2013). Violence or robbery can be redefined as unsuitable attempts to control extreme anger, shame, or need states.

2.5. Toward an Integrated Model

Personality and emotion regulation can be differentiated, but they are closely related. Personality traits can be perceived as dispositional dispositions that set the benchmark in the extent of emotional responsiveness and the kind of control that is sought. Due to a high score in Neuroticism and a low score in Conscientiousness, a person will be more vulnerable to negative moods of strong intensity and less internal resources (e.g., impulse control) to handle them adaptively. This can be theorized as follows: childhood maltreatment will result in a personality structure of instability and deficiency in inhibition; the unstable personality is the element of the criminal behaviors as a maladaptive, short-term solution. The study will aim at testing this integrated pathway in order to fill this literature gap that has been inclined to study these mediators independently.

3.Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The quantitative design was a non-experimental, cross-sectional study that relied on the correlational study design. This is an appropriate design to apply in cases where the researcher has an interest in examining the complex associations between more than two variables of interest and where mediation hypotheses are required to be tested; nevertheless, no causal conclusions can be reached.

3.2. Participants

Fifty students of a university (25 men and 25 women) were selected using a convenience sample of a large public university. The mean age was 20.4 years (SD = 1.8). Inclusion criteria included the following: ages between 18 and 25 years and informed consent. The exclusion criteria were: self-reported history of severe neurological disorder or acute psychotic symptoms. The gender balanced sample gave an opportunity to conduct exploratory research on the gender difference, but the main emphasis was on the entire sample.

3.3. Measures

Demographic Information Sheet: The data gathered concerning age, gender, year of study, and family socio-economic status.

- Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-Short Form (CTQ-SF; Bernstein et al., 2003): This is a self-report scale (28 items) that evaluates five forms of childhood maltreatment: Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Neglect, and Physical Neglect. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never True to 5 =Very Often True). The CTQ-SF has proved to be very reliable and valid. The overall score (the sum of all subscales) was taken in this work as the main measure of childhood abuse exposure in general (Cronbach 089).

- Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10; Ramstad and John, 2007): A 10-item ultra-short scale of the personality domains of the Five-Factor Model. Each of the domains (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness) is evaluated using two items on a 5-point scale (1 = Disagree Strongly to 5 = Agree Strongly). The BFI-10 is inexpensive in that it does not capture the depth of longer and more intricate methods, but it offers a consistent and valid indication of the personality structure that can be used in multi-scale research. To conduct the mediation analysis, the scores of Neuroticisms (72), Agreeableness (68), and Conscientiousness (71) were employed.

Considering the present study, the main difficulty lies in the Emotion Regulation Scale-Short Form (DERS-SF; Kaufman et al., 2016): an 18-item tool based on the original 36-item DERS. It has six measures of dysregulation that include Non-acceptance, Goals, Impulse, Awareness, Strategies, and Clarity. The rating will be based on a 5-point scale (1 = Rarely to 5 Always). The sum score points to dysregulation of emotions. Its psychometric properties are high, and it was applied in this study as the mediator (=.91).

Classified Self-Report Delinquency Scale (Based on Elliott and Agaton, 1980): A 15-item scale based on the non-clinical student population. The frequency of involvement in different antisocial and delinquent activities (e.g., Shoplifting, Vandalism, Physical assault, using hard drugs, Theft of property) of the last 3 years was reported. The answers were on a 5-point scale (0 = Never, 1 = Once, 2 = 2-3 times, 3 = 4-5 times, 4 = 6 or more times). A total criminal propensity score was the summation score (=.87).

3.4. Procedure

The Institutional Review Board of the university approved the study. The research was conducted online through a web-based survey (Qualtrics). The participants were recruited using the announcement at the classes and the university mailing lists. The information sheet on the study described the sensitivity of the questions, and the voluntary nature of the study, anonymity, and the right to exit the study. The questions were filled in the fixed order of the questionnaires, upon giving the digital informed consent: Demographics, CTQ-SF, BFI-10, DERS-SF, and Delinquency Scale. On completion, a debriefing page was shown in some detail with the contacts of the lead researcher and a list of mental health support services (e.g., University Counselling Centre, National Trauma Helpline). The whole process lasted about 20-25 minutes.

3.5. Data Analysis Plan

The analysis of the data was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Some initial screening was performed on missing data, outliers, and normality assumptions. Zero-order Pearson correlations between all the main study variables, as well as descriptive statistics, were calculated. To test the mediation hypotheses (H2, H3, H4), the PROCESS macro created by Hayes (Model 4 simple mediation, Model 6 sequential mediation) was applied using 5000 bootstrap samples to derive bias corrected 95% confidence intervals. The mediation effect is said to be statistically significant when the confidence interval excludes zero. Childhood abuse (CTQ total) was used as an independent variable, criminal propensity as a dependent variable, and personality traits (N, A, C) and emotional dysregulation (DERS total) were proposed to mediate between the two variables. All models added gender as a covariate.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

There were no major normality and univariate outliers in data screening. The number of missing data was low (less than 0.5 percent) and addressed through listwise deletion. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliabilities of all the measures. The average scores on the CTQ and Delinquency Scale represented the moderate level of the reported exposure to the trauma and the low-to-moderate level of the antisocial behaviors, which is expected in the non-clinical student sample. presenting the same data in different forms. Where statistical analysis has been done, please give the statistical method(s) used. The standard error should be presented in parenthesis in tables) or as error in graphical form. The probability level and statistically significant data should be indicated appropriately. Tables and figures should be presented as instructed above. Subsections and sub- subsections in this section too should be as given above.

Table 1: Mean, SD, and Correlations of Study Variables (N=50)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
CTQ-Total	38.20	12.45	1				
BFI-Neuroticism	3.45	0.89	.52	1			
BFI-Agreeableness	3.80	0.76	-.41	-.28	1		
BFI-Conscientiousness	3.65	0.82	-.48	-.35	.31	1	
DERS-Total	45.60	13.20	.63	.58	-.39	- .44	
Delinquency	8.95	7.10	.55	.46	-.50	- .52	.66

Note: CTQ = Childhood Trauma Questionnaire; BFI = the Big Five Inventory; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. p< 05. ,p < .01.

Correlation outcomes between childhood abuse (CTQ) and neuroticism (Table 1: r =.52, p<.01), emotional dysregulation (DERS; r =.63, P <.01), and criminal propensity were significant and positive (r =.52, p<.01). It had negative relations with the Agreeableness (r = -.41, p <.01) and Conscientiousness (r = -.48, p <.01) that confirms the hypothesis that the abuse is associated with a more vulnerable personality type. All the suggested intermediaries had a close connection with criminal inclination in the anticipated direction.

4.2. On the Tests of Hypotheses of Mediation

The covariate of gender was not significantly covariate, and it was included to control, but no interpretation was taken.

H1: Supported. Childhood abuse had a high effect on criminal propensity, b = 0.31, SE = 0.08, t (48) =3.88, p <;.001.

H2: Mediation by Personality. It carried out an individual simple mediation model with Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The three had been important negotiators. O Neuroticism: b = 0.08, Boot SE = 0.04, 95% Boot CI = [0.02, 0.18], which indicates a high value in the value of the indirect effect. The direct effect was not negligible, meaning that the effect was mediated as well. O Agreeableness: b was found to be significant, b = 0.10, Boot SE = 0.05, 95% Boot CI = [0.02, 0.22]. Partial mediation. O Conscientiousness: B was also significant, b = 0.12, Boot SE = 0.05, 95 percent Boot CI = [0.03, 0.24]. Partial mediation. Thus, H2 was fully supported.

H3: Emotional Dysregulation Mediation. The mask using DERS was also significant, b = 0.15, Boot SE = 0.06, 95% Boot CI [0.06, 0.29]. This no longer had a significant effect on delinquency (b = 0.16, p =.12), indicating that they were completely mediated by emotional dysregulation. H3 was supported.

H4: Sequential Mediation. A serial mediation model was carried out using the personality trait that had the most individual mediation (Conscientiousness) and DERS as the second variable (Model: Abuse → Conscientiousness → DERS → Delinquency). It was found that the sequence effect was significantly indirect, b* = 0.05, Boot SE = 0.03, 95% Boot CI = [0.01, 0.12]. The 4indirect effect via all channels was good. H4 was supported. This means that one of the mechanisms through which childhood abuse may affect criminal behaviors works through an initial suppressed Conscientiousness and subsequent gain in emotional dysregulation, which in turn boosts criminal tendencies.

5. Discussion

The main objective of this research was to define the psychological mechanisms that connect childhood abuse and criminal behaviors through the testing of a combined model that included personality and emotional dysregulation as the mediating factors. The results provide strong evidence of the hypothesis relationships and give a more detailed comprehension of the mechanism of this well-reported connection.

5.1. Summary and Interpretation of the most important findings

As several studies already indicate (Widom, 2017), a close direct correlation between retrospective reports of childhood abuse and self-reported criminal propensity was observed (H1). More to the point, personality traits and emotional dysregulation were both important factors that accounted for this relationship. The findings regarding H2 confirm that the survivors of abuse are more likely to experience a personality profile of a high level of emotional instability, low level of agreeableness, and low level of conscientiousness, which in itself is a significant predictor of antisocial behaviors (Jones et al., 2011). This is with the theories of traumatic environments affecting the long-term dispositions to negative emotionality, interpersonal distrust, and poor self-control. It was also interesting that the H3 support was especially high because emotional dysregulation completely mediated the abuse-delinquency connection. This highlights that the employment of emotion regulation deficits is the key proximal cause of crime. Lacking the capacity to cope with high levels of emotion such as anger, shame, or despair, people can use externalizing behaviors such as aggression, drug use, or acquisitive crime as a short-term maladaptive regulatory mechanism (Roberton et al., 2012). Most importantly, the sequential mediation (H4) has offered empirical evidence on an integrated developmental pathway. The discovery that childhood abuse is predictive of reduced Conscientiousness, which is then predictive of increased emotional dysregulation, which in turn is predictive of increased criminality, represents a possible form of causality. This implies that the low Conscientiousness levels of disinhibition and low impulse control make them vulnerable to being overwhelmed by emotions. A person with already low planning and restraint scores is not well-prepared to enact any adaptive regulation strategies in times of distress, and therefore, dysregulated criminal adaptation is more probable. This model fills the gap between dispositional (personality) and process-oriented (emotion regulation) explanations.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical ways of integration of the results are the following. To begin with, they offer a lending hand to the extensions of the General Strain Theory, i.e., emotional dysregulation is a predictor variable, and this predetermines one of the strategies, i.e., strain (abuse) translation into criminal coping. Secondly, they provide an insight into the developmental psychopathology models because they illustrate how the past traumas are internalized in the personality makeup in an attempt to cause a long-lasting vulnerability. The sequential model leads to the developmental cascade theory that states that once one system (formation of personality) is perturbed, then another system (control of emotion) is perturbed too, and the outcome is the failure of the formation of the behaviors.

5.3. Clinical implications, Practical implications

The high prevention and intervention implications of such findings are:

Child Protection and Screen and Early Intervention: The child protection services of the maltreated children must also encompass screening of problems arising in the sphere of emotion control and personality loss (ex. impulsiveness, callousness).

Trauma-Informed Rehabilitation: The juvenile justice programs and the criminal justice programmes will be informed by the trauma-informed rehabilitation. This manipulative attitude towards the treatment of the abused offenders can no longer be practiced in terms of the behavioral management process, as well as the dysregulations of feelings (e.g. Dialectical Behavior Therapy), and maladaptive patterns of personality (e.g., schema therapy) should also be discussed.

Prevention Programs: Universal school-based programs would serve as a buffer, offering emotional intelligence, distress tolerance, and impulse control that would grant the highest possibility of preventing the risk. Prevention in children would include the enhancement of the control mechanism.

5.4. Shortcomings and Prospects

Such a decision will need to be made by imposing a series of restrictions that will force one to arrive at the conclusions. To begin with, cross sectional study design cannot give final causal results. The inspired theory mediation models will be applied, yet the longitudinal or experimental studies will be required to establish the time precedence. Second, the possible issue of the common method and recall bias would be attributed to the self-reporting in the case of the former abuse as a child. Third, it is not a clinical sample because the sample represents the students of the university, and it is challenging to generalize the sample to more serious populations, such as populations of convicted offenders or populations with clinical diagnoses. The criminal behaviors had not been reported to have a high rank. Finally, the limited sample is enough to obtain the first mediation analysis; it may be limited to monotonicity of the estimates and the identification of more complex relationships, i.e., gender.

The longitudinal study of the at-risk children in their old age and the multi-measures (e.g., official records, the reports of the caregivers, and neuropsychological tasks) should be applied in future research. The research needs to be further developed according to other samples of clinical and forensic cases, as it is significant to realize how the model has external validity in more heinous cases. The other useful intervention would also be to consider those protective factors (e.g., secure attachment, high IQ, social support) that can also be implemented in the mentioned mediation pathways.

5.5. Conclusion

This paper presents strong arguments that the connection between childhood abuse and criminal behaviors is not straightforward. It is greatly mediated through the lasting scars that have been created upon the personality development and the vital ability to control emotions. The sequential nature of the pathway by which abuse leads to the development of a disinhibited personality that promotes emotional dysregulation provides a more integrated and clinically applicable conceptualization of the victim-to-offender pathway. By shifting our attention, as researchers have done, towards these mediating factors, i.e., by focusing on developing conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotion regulation ability, etc., we can ensure that we can develop a more effective approach towards the disruption of the cycle of violence and resiliency in survivors of childhood maltreatment.

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A Study on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding in Learning Management System (LMS) for MBA Students

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Abstract: The radical change in the learning materials would be a challenge both for students and teachers nowadays. In order to accomplish a learning task, students have to seek information and teachers must update themselves. However, they are left in the information divide. Ultimately the students must depend on the "meta-information". Hence needed a well-structured learning management system (LMS) to facilitate the learning process. And as a novice, students must be inculcated by the teachers based on their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. This paper investigates the significance of the role of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in Learning Management Systems (LMS) for college students. With a sample size of 122, the study assesses the significance of scaffold digital learning environments in relation to students' engagement, academic performance, and self-directed learning. Descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses were used in the study. The analysis of the data revealed a significant positive correlation between scaffolding strategies in LMS platforms and students' academic performance. The ZPD can be integrated with the role of more knowledgeable others (MKO) to facilitate the learning process. Thus, this study deals with the educational psychology.

Keywords: Higher Education, Digital Learning, MKO, Student Performance, student engagement

1. Introduction

The integration of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in higher education has transformed the learning process. The theoretical foundation of this transformation is rooted in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Scaffolding, as an instructional technique, provides structured support to bridge this gap.The zone of proximal development (ZPD), a fundamental theory developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), "represents the difference between what a learner can do with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other and what the learner can do alone." This theory, as a construct, has significantly impacted the way teaching, learning, and testing are viewed.

In this context, scaffolding, a metaphorical term of ZPD, developed by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), "represents the temporary supports that teachers provide to bridge the gap between what a learner can do and what the learner can potentially do."

2. Literature Review

2.1 Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a key concept in cognitive development, which Lev Vygotsky (1978) proposed as an essential area of cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that the ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

The ZPD was also operationalised in educational research through dynamic assessment, dialogic instruction, and collaborative problem-solving (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Modern understanding of the ZPD assumes that it is not only a cognitive gap but also a dynamic and intersubjective space, which is socially constructed (Daniels, 2016).

Wood et al. (1976) extended Vygotsky's framework by conceptualising scaffolding as a process in which a tutor adapts support to the learner's evolving competence. Effective scaffolding is characterised by contingency (responsiveness to learner needs), fading (gradual withdrawal of support), and transfer of responsibility to the learner (van de Pol et al., 2010).

Empirical research has documented positive effects of scaffolding on academic achievement across diverse domains including literacy, mathematics, and science (Pea, 2004; Reiser, 2004).

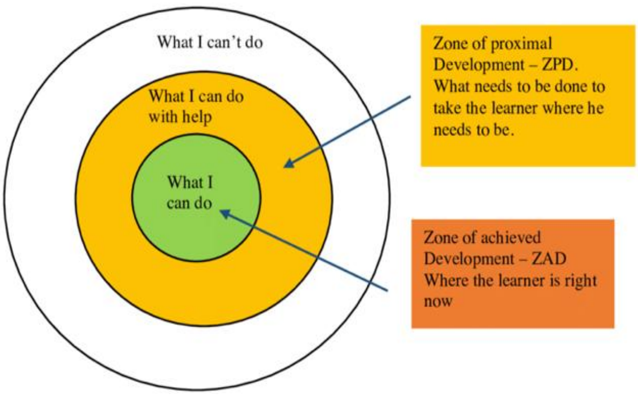
The "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which is one of the most fundamental concepts developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), refers to the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development." Wood et al. (1976) expanded Vygotsky's theory.

Cronbach's alpha (α) is the most commonly utilized measure of internal consistency in educational and psychological research (Cronbach, 1951. The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), can be explained as any person with profound subject knowledge or skills who can assist the learners to learn things through their zone of proximal development. He can be other than a teacher as friend, colleague or peer member.   (Abtahi, 2017).

2.2 Scaffolding

There is a large amount of variety in the way that the scaffolding metaphor is both understood and put into practice in education research, with some researchers stating that "some educators use scaffolding to refer to a broad range of unrelated things" (Hammond, 2002, p.2). In broad terms, scaffolding can also be described as "a way of helping children and young people develop their knowledge and skills" (Rasmussen, 2001, p.570).

Figure 1: Illustrative diagram explaining the zone of proximal development and the zone of achieved



development with scaffolding

(**Source:** Andragogy Theory – Malcolm Knowles)

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the role of ZPD in LMS-based learning.
- To examine the impact of scaffolding on student engagement.
- To evaluate the relationship between scaffolding and academic performance.
- To assess the effectiveness of LMS in facilitating guided learning.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size is very much restricted to 122 students only. As MBA (Master of Business Administration) is a programme with heterogenous background, the perception and adaptability of the students differ. The apprehending ability of the students may differ.

Hypotheses

H1: Scaffolding in LMS has a significant impact on student academic performance.

H2: There is a positive correlation between ZPD-based learning and student engagement.

H3: LMS features significantly predict self-regulated learning.

3.Research Methodology

The research design was descriptive and analytical. The sample size taken was 122 postgraduate business (Master of Business Administration) students and the sampling technique was convenience sampling. A purposive sample was done. Three groups as for the scaffolding was done as,i) control (n = 40), ii) low Scaffold (n = 41), and iii) high Scaffold (n = 41).

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Reliability statistics

A Cronbach's Alpha of 0.89 indicates high internal consistency**.**

Table 1 - Frequency distribution

Course	Male	Female	Total
I MBA	36	29	65
II MBA	32	25	57
Total	68	54	122

4.2 Descriptive Statistics by Instructional Group

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics

Group	n	ZPD Mean	ZPD SD	Scaffold Mean	Scaffold SD	Total N
Control	40	3.71	1.38	2.73	1.52	122
Low Scaffold	41	3.12	1.33	4.25	0.66	122
High Scaffold	41	2.77	1.58	2.35	1.04	122
Total	**122**	**3.19**	**1.47**	**3.11**	**1.39**	122

Interpretation: It has been clearly shown that the high scaffold group has better results.

4.3 Item-Level Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Indices

Table 3 - Item-Level Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Indices (N = 122)

Item	Description	Subscale	M	SD	rit	αD
Q1	Teacher identifies learning gap	ZPD	3.41	1.59	0.481	0.913
Q2	Appropriate challenge level	ZPD	3.22	1.61	0.641	0.902
Q3	Learner potential recognition	ZPD	3.25	1.58	0.791	0.890
Q4	Guided participation quality	ZPD	3.08	1.62	0.895	0.881
Q5	Independent task performance	ZPD	3.01	1.56	0.947	0.877

Q6	Scaffold clarity	Scaffolding	3.27	1.53	0.944	0.878
Q7	Scaffold fading	Scaffolding	3.08	1.54	0.890	0.882
Q8	Contingent support	Scaffolding	3.12	1.53	0.763	0.892
Q9	Peer scaffolding	Scaffolding	2.94	1.53	0.615	0.903
Q10	Feedback quality	Scaffolding	3.14	1.49	0.354	0.919

** M = mean; SD = standard deviation; rit = corrected item-total correlation; αD = Cronbach's alpha if item deleted.*

Interpretation

Among the ZPD, the parameter Guided participation quality has the highest standard deviation, which means it has a strong impact of the teachers on the learning management system towards the students. Out of the scaffolding parameters, the standard deviation is high and equal for scaffold clarity, contingent support and and peer scaffolding which signifies all the three parameters are pertinent.

4.4 Paired t-test on the LMS usage

Table 4 – Paired t-test

Variable	Mean	Sample size (N)	SD	Std. Error mean
Before LMS usage	3.21	122	0.74	0.067
After Before LMS usage	3.89	122	0.68	0.062

Table 5 - Paired samples test

Pair	Mean diff.	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Before usage-after usage	-0.68	0.59	0.053	-12.83	121	0.000

Interpretation

The mean score was increased from 3.21 (before LMS) to 3.89 (after LMS)**,** which strongly indicates that there is an improvement in learning outcomes after LMS adoption. Also, the mean difference (-0.68) shows a substantial positive shift in the students' performance/engagement with the LMS. The t-value (-12.83**)** is large, and the p-value (0.000 < 0.05) indicates that the difference is statistically significant. Thus, it can be concluded that the improvement is not due to chance.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 – Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Scaffolding	3.92	0.68
ZPD Alignment	3.85	0.72
Learner's engagement	4.01	0.64
Academic performance	3.78	0.70

Interpretation

Out of the four variables, the standard deviation for the ZPD alignment is high.

4.6 Correlation Analysis

Table 7 - Pearson Correlation

Variable	Scaffolding	ZPD	Engagement	Performance
Scaffolding	1	0.62**	0.68**	0.71**
ZPD	0.62**	1	0.65**	0.67**
Engagement	0.68**	0.65**	1	0.73**
Performance	0.73**	0.67**	0.73**	1

**p < 0.01

Interpretation

There is a strong positive correlation between scaffolding and academic performance (r = 0.71), indicating that enhanced support mechanisms in LMS improve student outcomes.

4.7 Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable taken is Academic Performance

Predictor	Beta value	t-value	Significance
Scaffolding	0.42	5.12	0.000
Engagement	0.36	4.45	0.000
ZPD Alignment	0.28	3.67	0.001

$R^2 = 0.64$

Interpretation:

The model explains 64% of the variance in academic performance. Scaffolding emerges as the strongest predictor.

The above findings clearly evince the Vygotsky's theoretical framework, highlighting that LMS platforms incorporating scaffolding techniques significantly enhance learning outcomes. Features such as guided modules, peer discussion forums, and adaptive feedback align well with ZPD principles. The process of scaffolding has a significant impact towards the academic performance of the MBA students. ZPD-based learning enhances the student's participation and involvement. In no doubt, learning management system (LMS) features promotes self-learning principles. For an effective LMS tutoring, the faculty must identify the level of understanding of the students and must deploy the degree of scaffolding accordingly. A real-time feedback mechanism must be adopted for a effective system. A collaborative learning environment can be implemented to facilitate the flexibility of the learning process.

5. Conclusion

The study confirms that the integration of ZPD and scaffolding in LMS creates a more effective and engaging learning environment for MBA students. Institutions should focus on designing LMS platforms that support guided learning to maximize student potential. LMS platforms can be diversify the stereotypic book reading. Also, ZPD will enhance the level of confidence among the students. The degree of scaffolding has a positive impact. Higher the degree of scaffolding creates better learning environment and it may induce the receptivity of the learners and reduce the frustration. Not only the teachers, the more knowledgeable others (MKO) can be helpful in assisting the students.

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Psychological Stress and Human-Monkey Conflict: Evidence from Rural Farming Communities in Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Human–wildlife conflict has become an increasingly significant challenge in rural agricultural landscapes, particularly in regions where human activities overlap with wildlife habitats. In Sri Lanka, interactions between farming communities and toque macaques (*Macaca sinica*) have intensified, resulting in recurring crop damage and livelihood disruption. While previous studies have largely focused on ecological and economic dimensions, limited attention has been given to the psychological impacts of such conflicts. This study examines the relationship between human–monkey conflict and psychological stress among rural farming households in the Kurunegala District. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, with data collected from 40 households using a structured questionnaire. Psychological stress was measured using a six-item Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.916$), while perception toward conflict was assessed using a five-item scale ($\alpha = 0.892$). Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, t-tests, ANOVA, and multiple regression were conducted using SPSS. The findings indicate that crop loss is the only significant predictor of psychological stress ($\beta = 0.955$, $p < 0.001$), with a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.956$, $p < 0.001$). financial loss, frequency of monkey encounters, income level, and perception did not show statistically significant relationships with stress ($p > 0.05$). These results suggest that direct, visible damage to livelihoods has a stronger psychological impact than perceived risk or estimated economic loss. The study highlights the importance of integrating psychological dimensions into human–wildlife conflict research and emphasizes the need for mitigation strategies that prioritize reducing crop damage. A more holistic approach that considers both material and experiential aspects of conflict is essential for promoting sustainable human–wildlife coexistence.

Keywords: Human–wildlife conflict, psychological stress, crop loss, toque macaque, rural livelihoods, Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

Human–wildlife conflict (HWC) has increasingly emerged as a critical socio-ecological issue in many parts of South Asia, particularly in regions where agricultural expansion overlaps with natural habitats. In Sri Lanka, this phenomenon is especially evident in interactions between rural farming communities and non-human primates such as the toque macaque. Over the past few decades, land-use changes, including deforestation and agricultural intensification, have contributed to habitat fragmentation, thereby increasing the spatial overlap between humans and wildlife. As a result, crop raiding, property damage, and frequent encounters have become routine experiences for many rural households (Dittus, 2012; Cabral et al., 2018). Previous research has consistently highlighted that human–monkey conflict in Sri Lanka has intensified to a level that significantly affects both livelihoods and local ecosystems. Cabral et al. (2018) describe the situation as approaching “crisis proportions,” largely due to the combined effects of environmental degradation and the adaptive behavior of macaques in human-dominated landscapes. Similarly, Dittus (2012) emphasizes that the reduction of natural food sources has led to increased dependence of macaques on cultivated crops, thereby escalating conflict frequency.

These findings suggest that HWC is not merely an ecological issue but a complex interaction shaped by environmental, economic, and behavioral factors. The economic impacts of such conflicts are well documented. Rural farmers frequently experience substantial crop losses, reduced productivity, and additional labor costs associated with guarding and deterrence strategies. In the Sri Lankan context, Jayarathne (2025) demonstrates that farmers living in close proximity to toque macaque populations are subject to recurring economic burdens, with crop damage occurring on a near-daily basis in some areas. The study further highlights that the absence of effective long-term mitigation strategies forces farmers to rely on short-term, labor-intensive methods, which often provide limited success. Complementing this, Pemadasa (2022) notes that while local communities have developed various coping mechanisms, these strategies rarely address the root causes of conflict and therefore fail to reduce its long-term impacts.

Despite the substantial body of literature on ecological drivers and economic consequences, relatively less attention has been paid to the psychological dimensions of human–wildlife conflict. This represents a significant gap, as the lived experience of conflict extends beyond measurable financial loss. Repeated exposure to crop damage, uncertainty in harvest outcomes, and the need for constant vigilance can contribute to psychological stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue among affected populations. Studies in broader human–wildlife systems suggest that such stress is often shaped not only by objective economic loss but also by subjective perceptions of risk and insecurity (Suratissa, 2020). In many rural contexts, these psychological impacts remain underreported, as they are often normalized within daily life. Furthermore, emerging evidence indicates that the perception of loss may play a more critical role than actual financial calculations in shaping human responses to wildlife conflict. Farmers may react more strongly to visible crop destruction than to estimated monetary loss, suggesting that emotional and experiential factors are central to understanding conflict dynamics. However, empirical studies that quantitatively examine these relationships, particularly within the Sri Lankan context, remain limited. Most existing research relies on descriptive or qualitative approaches, with fewer studies employing statistical methods to analyze the relationship between different dimensions of conflict and psychological outcomes. In addition, commonly used mitigation strategies, such as fencing, noise deterrents, and crop guarding, have shown limited effectiveness in reducing long-term conflict. As noted by Cabral et al. (2018), these approaches often fail to account for the behavioral adaptability of macaques, resulting in continued crop raiding despite ongoing interventions. This persistent inefficiency not only prolongs economic loss but may also exacerbate feelings of frustration and helplessness among farmers. Consequently, there is a need to move beyond purely ecological or technical solutions and consider the human dimension of conflict more comprehensively. Given these gaps, the present study aims to examine human–monkey conflict through a combined socio-economic and psychological lens. Specifically, it investigates how crop loss, financial loss, and the frequency of monkey encounters are associated with psychological stress among rural farming communities in the Kurunegala District of Sri Lanka. By employing a quantitative approach supported by statistical analysis, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of human–wildlife interactions. In doing so, it highlights the importance of integrating mental health considerations into conservation strategies and policy interventions, thereby promoting more sustainable and socially responsive approaches to human–wildlife coexistence.

2. Material and Methods

This study was conducted in the Kurunegala District of the North Western Province of Sri Lanka, specifically within the Kuliyapitiya West Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD). Data were collected from three Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions Elathalawa, Deegalla, and Kabalewa, which are predominantly rural and characterized by smallholder agricultural practices. The area has been increasingly affected by human–monkey conflict, particularly involving the toque macaque, due to ongoing habitat fragmentation and agricultural expansion. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed to examine the relationship between dimensions of human–monkey conflict and psychological stress among rural farmers. Data were collected from 40 farming households (n = 40) selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals directly experiencing monkey-related disturbances. Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire administered via face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire comprised sections on demographic characteristics, exposure to conflict (crop loss, financial loss, and encounter frequency), psychological stress, coping strategies, and perceptions toward wildlife. Psychological stress was measured using a six-item Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), capturing dimensions such as perceived stress, anxiety, income insecurity, sleep disturbance, helplessness, and family impact. A composite stress score (stress total) was calculated as the mean of these items. Independent variables included: (i) crop loss (categorized as <10%, 10–25%, 26–50%, >50%), (ii) financial loss (categorized by monthly income loss), and (iii) frequency of monkey encounters (daily to rarely). Socio-demographic variables such as income level and gender were included as control variables. The internal consistency of the stress scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated high reliability ($\alpha = 0.916$). Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize the data. Pearson correlation analysis was applied to examine relationships between stress and conflict-related variables. Differences in stress levels across gender and income groups were tested using independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA, respectively. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify significant predictors of psychological stress. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to data collection. All responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

3. Results and Discussion

A total of 40 respondents were included in the analysis. The sample consisted of an equal distribution of males and females (50% each). The majority of participants were within the 31–60 age range, indicating a predominantly active farming population. Educational attainment varied, with the largest proportion having completed Advanced Level education (27.5%), followed by individuals with no formal or primary education (45% combined). In terms of economic status, 37.5% of respondents reported a monthly household income between LKR 50,000 –75,000, while 25% earned below LKR 25,000. Exposure to human–monkey conflict was frequent, with 25% reporting daily encounters and 35% experiencing encounters monthly. Crop loss was widely distributed across categories, with 55% of respondents reporting damage exceeding 25%, indicating a substantial level of agricultural impact across the sample.

Reliability of Scales

The psychological stress scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.916$), confirming that the six items reliably measure a single underlying construct. Similarly, the perception scale showed high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.892$), indicating consistency in responses related to attitudes toward monkey-related disturbances. These results validate the use of composite variables for subsequent statistical analyses.

Descriptive Analysis of Psychological Stress and Perception

The mean psychological stress score was 2.61 (SD = 1.06), suggesting a moderate level of stress among respondents. This indicates that while stress is present across the sample, its intensity varies considerably between individuals. The perception scores also reflected a moderate level (M = 2.58, SD = 1.03), suggesting that respondents generally recognize monkey-related disturbances as a concern, although attitudes are not uniformly extreme. The similarity between stress and perception means indicates that both constructs are present within the community, but their relationship requires further examination through inferential analysis.

Relationship between Conflict Variables and Psychological Stress

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between crop loss and psychological stress ($r = 0.956$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that increases in crop damage are closely associated with higher levels of stress among farmers. The strength of this relationship suggests that crop loss is a central factor shaping psychological outcomes in the context of human–monkey conflict. The financial loss did not show a statistically significant relationship with stress ($r = 0.263$, $p = 0.101$). Although financial loss represents an important economic dimension of conflict, the absence of statistical significance suggests that perceived monetary value alone does not directly translate into psychological distress. This distinction highlights the possibility that tangible and visible losses, such as crop damage, may have a stronger emotional impact than abstract financial estimates.

Gender and Income Differences in Stress

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in stress levels between male and female respondents. Although males reported slightly higher stress levels ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.99$) compared to females ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.07$), the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.686$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that psychological stress associated with human–monkey conflict is experienced relatively similarly across genders. Similarly, a one-way ANOVA was performed to assess differences in stress across income groups. The results indicated no statistically significant variation in stress levels based on income ($F = 1.006$, $p = 0.401$). This finding implies that economic status alone does not significantly influence psychological responses to conflict, further reinforcing the importance of direct experiential factors over broader socio-economic indicators.

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Psychological Stress

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the key predictors of psychological stress. The overall model was statistically significant ($F = 93.77$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 91.5% of the variance in stress levels ($R^2 = 0.915$), indicating a strong model fit. Among the predictors, crop loss emerged as the only statistically significant variable ($\beta = 0.955$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating a substantial positive effect on stress. This confirms that crop damage is the primary driver of psychological distress among respondents. Income ($\beta \approx 0$, $p = 0.999$), frequency of monkey encounters ($\beta = –0.015$, $p = 0.770$), and financial loss ($\beta \approx 0$, $p = 0.953$) were not significant predictors. These results suggest that neither the frequency of exposure nor generalized economic conditions significantly contribute to stress when crop loss is accounted for in the model.

Perception and Psychological Stress

Further analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between perception and psychological stress. The results indicated a weak and non-significant negative relationship ($r = –0.238$, $p = 0.140$). The finding suggests that while respondents may perceive monkeys as a threat, such perceptions do not directly translate into increased stress levels. Instead, psychological distress appears to be more closely associated with actual material outcomes, particularly crop loss, rather than subjective attitudes or perceived risk.

Psychological stress in human–monkey conflict is driven primarily by direct crop loss, while economic estimates, encounter frequency, and perceptions do not significantly influence stress.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings and Interpretations

Variable	Analysis Type	Statistical Result	Significance	Direction	Interpretation	Supporting Literature
Crop Loss	Correlation	r = 0.956	p < 0.001	Positive	Strong predictor of stress	Cabral et al. (2018); Dittus (2012); Jayarathne (2025)
Crop Loss	Regression	β = 0.955	p < 0.001	Positive	Primary determinant of psychological stress	Jayarathne (2025)
Financial Loss	Correlation	r = 0.263	p = 0.101	Weak Positive	Not significantly related to stress	Suratissa (2020)
Financial Loss	Regression	β = -0.003	p = 0.953	Negligible	Economic estimates do not drive stress	Dickman (2010)
Frequency of Encounters	Regression	β = -0.015	p = 0.770	Negligible	Exposure alone does not increase stress	Dickman (2010)
Perception	Correlation	r = -0.238	p = 0.140	Weak Negative	Attitudes do not significantly influence stress	Dittus (2012)
Gender	t-test	t = 1.686	p > 0.05	—	No significant gender difference	—
Income	ANOVA	F = 1.006	p = 0.401	—	Stress not influenced by income level	—

4. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between human–monkey conflict and psychological stress among rural farming communities in the Kurunegala District of Sri Lanka. The findings provide clear evidence that crop loss is the primary determinant of psychological stress, while other commonly assumed factors, such as financial loss, encounter frequency, and perception, do not exhibit significant influence. These results offer important insights into the lived experience of human–wildlife conflict and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of its socio-psychological dimensions. A key finding of this study is the strong and statistically significant relationship between crop loss and psychological stress. This supports existing literature that emphasizes the central role of agricultural damage in shaping human–wildlife conflict outcomes. For example, Cabral et al. (2018) identified crop raiding as one of the most critical drivers of conflict in Sri Lanka, noting that repeated agricultural losses directly affect household stability and livelihood security. Similarly, Dittus (2012) observed that the increasing reliance of toque macaques on cultivated food sources has intensified crop damage, particularly in areas where natural habitats have been degraded. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that crop loss is not only an economic issue but also a significant psychological stressor, reinforcing the need to consider human well-being in conflict assessments.

Interestingly, financial loss did not emerge as a significant predictor of stress, despite its close conceptual relationship with crop damage. This finding suggests that objective monetary estimates may not fully capture the experiential impact of loss. While previous studies, including Jayarathne (2025), have documented the economic burden associated with human–monkey conflict, the current results indicate that farmers respond more strongly to visible and immediate damage rather than abstract financial calculations. This aligns with broader research in human–wildlife conflict, which suggests that perceived severity and direct experience often outweigh calculated economic values in shaping human responses (Suratissa, 2020). In this context, crop loss may represent a more tangible and emotionally salient form of impact, thereby exerting a stronger influence on psychological stress. Another notable finding is the lack of a significant relationship between the frequency of monkey encounters and stress levels. Although frequent encounters are commonly assumed to increase conflict intensity, the results suggest that exposure alone does not necessarily translate into psychological distress. This may be explained by a process of normalization, whereby communities living in close proximity to wildlife become accustomed to regular encounters over time. Similar observations have been reported in other human–wildlife contexts, where repeated exposure leads to adaptive behavioral responses rather than heightened stress (Dickman, 2010). In the Sri Lankan setting, daily or routine encounters with monkeys may therefore be perceived as a normal aspect of rural life, reducing their psychological impact unless accompanied by direct economic damage.

The analysis of perception further supports this interpretation. Although respondents reported moderate levels of concern regarding monkey-related disturbances, perception was not significantly associated with stress. This finding suggests that attitudinal factors alone are insufficient to explain psychological outcomes. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of human attitudes in shaping conflict dynamics (Dittus, 2012; Cabral et al., 2018), the present study indicates that attitudes do not necessarily translate into measurable stress. Instead, stress appears to be more closely linked to material consequences, particularly those affecting livelihood security. This distinction is important, as it challenges the assumption that negative perceptions directly lead to psychological distress. Additionally, the absence of significant differences in stress across gender and income groups suggests that the psychological impact of human–monkey conflict is relatively uniform across socio-demographic categories. This finding implies that the stress associated with crop loss is widely experienced across the community, regardless of economic status or gender roles. While some studies have suggested that vulnerability to environmental stressors may vary across social groups, the present results indicate that the effects of direct agricultural damage may override such differences in this context.

The regression analysis further reinforces the central role of crop loss, identifying it as the only significant predictor of psychological stress. The high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.915$) highlights the strength of this relationship and underscores the importance of focusing on crop damage as a key factor in both research and policy interventions. This finding is consistent with Jayarathne (2025), which emphasizes the continuous and cumulative nature of crop loss experienced by farmers living alongside macaque populations. However, the present study advances this understanding by demonstrating that the psychological consequences of such losses are equally significant, thereby expanding the scope of human–wildlife conflict research beyond economic considerations. The findings suggest that human–wildlife conflict should be understood not only as an ecological or economic issue but also as a lived experience shaped by direct material impacts. The dominance of crop loss as a predictor of stress highlights the importance of addressing tangible forms of damage in conflict mitigation strategies. Interventions that focus solely on reducing encounter frequency or altering perceptions may have limited effectiveness if they do not directly reduce crop damage. From a policy perspective, these results point to the need for integrated approaches that combine ecological management with socio-economic and psychological considerations. Improving the effectiveness of crop protection measures, developing sustainable deterrent strategies, and providing support mechanisms for affected farmers may help reduce both economic losses and associated stress. Furthermore, incorporating mental health perspectives into conservation planning could enhance the long-term sustainability of human–wildlife coexistence initiatives.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between human–monkey conflict and psychological stress among rural farming communities in Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka, using a quantitative approach. The findings demonstrate that crop loss is the primary and most significant predictor of psychological stress, while financial loss, encounter frequency, income, and perception do not show significant influence. These results suggest that direct, visible damage to livelihoods has a stronger psychological impact than abstract economic estimates or subjective attitudes. By integrating statistical analysis with socio-ecological context, this study highlights the importance of understanding human–wildlife conflict as both a material and experiential phenomenon. The findings contribute to existing literature by emphasizing that effective conflict mitigation strategies must prioritize reducing crop damage while also acknowledging the broader implications for human well-being. Accordingly, policies aimed at improving coexistence should adopt a more holistic approach that incorporates economic, ecological, and psychological dimensions of conflict.

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Artificial Intelligence-Driven Analytical and Employee Wellbeing: Ethical Implications for Learning, Assessment and Organizational Psychology

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed learning, assessment, and organizational psychology by enabling predictive modelling of employee behaviour, performance measurement, and employee wellbeing tracking. AI can analyse real-time data, including engagement metrics, communication sentiment, stress indicators, and wearable device data, to identify burnout risks, mental health concerns, and factors influencing job satisfaction. These insights support personalized interventions, data-driven psychological assistance, realistic evaluations, and early burnout detection programmes.Despite its benefits, AI raises important ethical concerns. Employee surveillance may threaten privacy and create discomfort in the workplace. Algorithmic bias can result in unfair evaluations, promotions, or access to resources if systems are trained on biased data. In addition, black-box AI decision-making reduces transparency, accountability, and fairness by limiting employees' understanding of how decisions are made. Overreliance on AI may also undermine human intuition, empathy, and psychological understanding that are essential in organizational dynamics.Responsible AI use in employee wellbeing management requires strong ethical guidelines, including informed consent, data privacy protections, regular bias audits, explainable AI, equitable access to AI benefits, and human oversight of decision-making processes. Organizations must also provide support and guidance to ensure employees feel psychologically safe and confident when using AI-powered systems. While AI can promote healthier, more inclusive, and supportive workplaces, safeguards are necessary to protect employee wellbeing and mental health.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Employee Wellbeing, Ethical Implications, Organizational Psychology, HR Analytics

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The recent surge in the development of artificial intelligence (AI) has deeply transformed the contemporary working environment, spreading its impact onto the sphere of human resource management, the advancement of learning and development, performance evaluation, and the field of organizational psychology in general. Now AI-driven analytics are able to process large volumes of data about employees in real time, providing insights into future behaviors, productivity, and mental conditions (Zong et al., Guan 2025).AI supports individualized training routes, adaptable e-learning systems as well as skill gap analyses that match personal progress with organizational requirements in the context of learning (Awashreh et al., Hassiba et al., 2025). Such tools will become more efficient in knowledge acquisition and career advancement because it allows customizing the content based on the pace, preferences, and performance patterns of the learners (Vadisetty et al., Polamarasetti et al., 2024).Equally, AI-based assessments have revolutionized the nature of assessment such as automated resume screening, psychometric testing, performance appraisals, as well as predictive models of potential (Aggarwal et al., Sharma et al., 2025). The purpose of such systems is to minimize human bias, enhance objectivity, and have data-rich feedback with which to improve continuously.These AI analytics are used in organizational psychology to interpret the workplace dynamics, including team cohesion, motivation, stress, and mental health in genera**l** (Waseem 2026). After studying the sentiment of communication, engagement rates, and even physiological cues of connected devices, AI can be used to preventively intervene to make workplaces healthier (OMOSE et al., IKUYINMINU et al., 2024).

The potential of these technologies is that they can be used to address the wellbeing of employees, detecting burnout early, suggesting individual wellness programs, and reducing workloads to encourage their satisfaction, resilience, and overall success in their jobs (Awashreh et al., AlGhunaimi et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, there are deep-seated issues in this integration. Massive data gathering makes the issues of surveillance, consent, and the loss of individual borders in the workplace very serious.

In addition, algorithmic decision-making poses risks of implicit bias, no transparency on obscure models, and the possibility of inequities which may disproportionately impact some groups of employees unequally, compromising equitableness and trust (Bahangulu et al., Owusu-Berko et al 2025).

Finally, though AI-based analytics has the potential to change learning, assessment, and organizational psychology positively, its implementation requires special care regarding ethics because it should be implemented in a way that does not harm human dignity and autonomy but instead promotes them (Dey, 2024).

1.2 Review of Literature

Recent studies in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) in organizations show that it has a two-sided effect on employee wellbeing, engagement, performance, and the entire industrial-organizational psychology. Research indicates that AI-based tools, such as sentiment analysis, predictive modelling, and HR analytics, improve productivity, interventions are more personal, workflows are optimized, and adaptive leadership is supported by incorporating the elements of emotional intelligence, such as empathy and self-regulation (Ateeq et al., 2025; Ibrampur et al., 2026; Suvarna, 2025; Ahmad and Ullah, 2025). As an example, predictive analytics via clusters can be used to implement proactive, segment-based HR policies that can be applied instead of one-size-fits-all, establishing fairness, transparency, and engagement and increasing organizational resilience and long-term digital transformation using emotional intelligence systems that recognize stress patterns and tailor mental health services.

The systematic reviews and meta-analyses confirm the positive correlations between AI implementation and other areas of industrial-organizational psychology including the impact of automation on the future workplace and the role of big data in measuring, analyzing, and implementing ethically (Asfahani, 2022; Oswald et al., 2020). Nevertheless, serious issues arise when it comes to the dark side of AI such as the threat of job loss, the lack of trust, thwarted psychological contract, lowered psychological safety, and employee depression, especially when the human-centered interaction and empathy are diminished by AI (Ateeq et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2025; Varma et al., 2023).

Such ethical issues as the absence of transparency, algorithmic discrimination, breaches of privacy, and possible dehumanization can jeopardize dignity, equity, and mental health unless addressed (Kim et al., 2025; Varma et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2025). Ethical leadership and psychological safety are the key mediators to reduce negative impacts whereas human-oriented design, continuous training, anti-bias measures, and transparent governance are suggested to combine innovation with wellbeing (Kim et al., 2025; Gupta et al., 2025; Varma et al., 2023).

In such industries as Islamic banking, AI-based HR analytics is positively linked to wellbeing as it serves as organizational and psychological resource in models such as JD-R and Self-Determination Theory (Ahmad and Ullah, 2025). In general, although AI can simplify the daily workflow, enable strategic priorities, and contribute to altruistic results, its indiscriminate use can contribute to increased stress, displacement anxiety, and injustice (Tiwari et al., 2024).

To make AI sustainable; organizations need to seek a balanced approach that is humanistic and focused on sustainably managing AI through ethical governance, ensuring there is fairness, employee upskilling, and human oversight (Eswaran et al., Eswaran et al., Murali et al., and Eswaran et al., 2024). This will make AI to complement instead of undermine worker wellbeing, involvement, and prosperity in the changing digital work environments.

1.3 Problem Statement

The quick rise of analytics of artificial intelligence in the management of human resources has presented capabilities of powerful monitoring, predicting and interfering in the wellbeing of employees and, at the same time, changed the process in the learning, assessment, and organizational psychology. Companies are using AI to process multimodal data, such as sentiment on communications, engagement data, productivity trends, and even physiological data such as wearables in order to predict stress, burnout risks, engagement, or even deteriorating mental health in real time. This allows taking anticipatory action like dietary wellness prescriptions, active workload management, custom training solution, and more objective performance reviews, which, in theory, leads to healthier and more conducive workplaces (Virgillito et al., & Ledda et al., 2025).

Regardless of such potential advantages, there is an inherent conflict between organizational effectiveness and individual privacy when the highly personal data of employees are collected and processed to obtain wellbeing information (Dongre 2024). Employees are usually subject to undercover surveillance that goes beyond the standard performance monitoring in the workplace into psychological and emotional spheres, making it difficult to distinguish between professional competence and intrusive personal presence (Manley et al., & Williams et al., 2022).

One of the fundamental issues is the disappearance of privacy as the AI systems collect sensitive data without necessarily obtaining fully informed, continued consent or without offering a clear view of how data is employed, stored, shared, or stored (Akhtar et al., Kumar et al., & Nayyar et al., 2024). It may result in a sense of constant surveillance, anxiety, loss of control, and mental stress, which contravenes the entire benefit that these tools are meant to safeguard (Kumar et al., Saini et al., and Jeet et al., 2024).

In addition to this, the fact that AI models are based on algorithmic bias due to the inclusion of skewed training data representing underrepresented and diverse demographics is likely to lead to unfair or discriminatory results in wellbeing measures, resource distribution, learning opportunities, or psychological intervention, replicating inequities based on gender, age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

These problems are aggravated bby the opacity of most AI systems that are often called black-box, making the decision-making process inexplicable; the employees and even the HR professionals might find it difficult to comprehend why an AI identifies somebody as a burnout victim or suggests certain interventions, which undermines the trust, responsibility, and fairness in organizational practices. It is also possible to lose the essence of genuine support systems and genuine interpersonal interaction, an essential element of mental health, in the organizational psychology scenario, where over-reliance on AI-based insights risks dehumanizing organizational relationships by replacing subtlety in human judgments and empathy with automated estimations that could lack the contextual nuances or cultural sensitivity.

Moreover, the duality of the technologies, which could improve wellbeing and at the same time initiate a more intensive performance monitoring or penalizing of employees, implies the presence of power asymmetry, with employers having more control than ever before over the psychological health of their workers, which might encourage organizational cultures of fear and inhibit them.

Finally, although AI analytics promise a revolutionary improvement in the development of employee wellbeing by providing data-driven learning, assessment, and psychological support, their unchecked and unregulated use is fraught with significant ethical risks such as privacy breaches, reinforcement of bias, absence of transparency, loss of human agency, and other psychological health-related harm that require immediate attention and regulation to ensure technology is used to serve human dignity and not to compromise it in a contemporary workplace.

1.4 Objectives

- Investigate the role of the AI-led analytics for employee learning, assessment, and organizational psychology.
- To recognize the ethical concerns of AI-powered workplace analytics, such as privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, and opacity.
- To propose responsible uses of AI that support the wellbeing of employees, psychological autonomy and trust in the organization.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual diagram offered explains the complex and mostly adverse influence of the AI-driven analytics on the wellbeing of the employees in the organizational context. There are four major ethical risk areas which start at the core of AI-Driven Analytics: Privacy Erosion (because of ubiquitous data gathering and surveillance), Algorithmic Bias (because of biased predictions and actions), Lack of Transparency (because of purported black-box decision-making) and Dehumanization (because of eroded human relationship and sentiment).

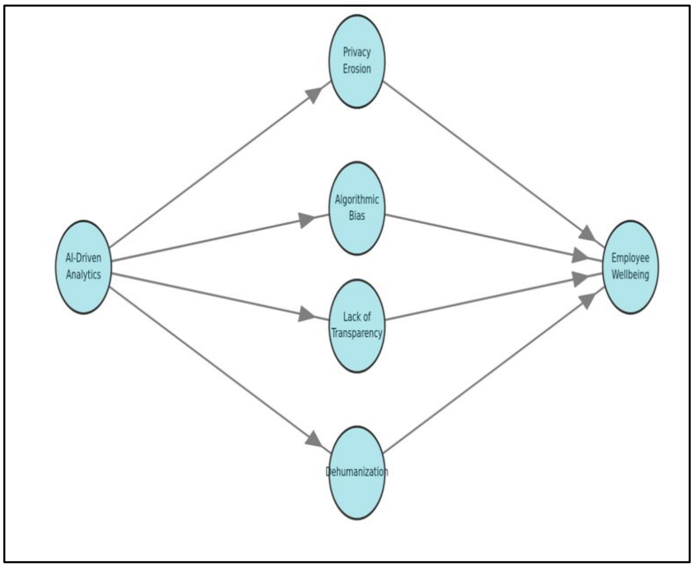

Figure 01 – Conceptual Framework

All these mediating variables are depicted to have a direct negative effect (arrows pointing towards) Employee Wellbeing, which means the deployment of AI analytics without control or regulation can have a cumulative adverse effect on the psychological wellbeing, control, trust, equity, and general flourishing at work. According to the model, although AI comes with some potential benefits, these four key ethical issues emerge as the key mediating variables or threats that are likely to degrade as opposed to promoting wellbeing when poorly managed. Overall, the diagram is a visual indicator of the interrelated ethical risks that should be alleviated to avoid negative consequences of the exposure to AI-enhanced workplaces among employees in terms of their mental and emotional well-being.

2. Materials And Methods

2.1. Research Design

The current paper takes the form of a qualitative, conceptual research focusing on a conceptual literature review to determine the ethical considerations of AI-based analytics in learning, assessment, organizational psychology, and workforce wellbeing. The sources databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and PubMed, were searched with the keywords such as AI ethics HR, artificial intelligence employee wellbeing, algorithmic bias organizational psychology, ethical AI workplace analytics to get relevant peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports that would be released within 2018-25. Inclusion criteria were limited to works that cover AI applications in HR/organizational situations, ethical issues (privacy, bias, transparency, autonomy), and effects on psychological health or wellbeing and that did not constitute purely technical or non-ethical research works. Based on the PRISMA-inspired principles, the chosen sources were subject to thematic analysis that identified, classified, and synthesized major ethical tensions, advantages, risks, and suggested precautions in the identified areas. The desk-based approach is a methodology that allows an interdisciplinary, comprehensive synthesis without primary data gathering and provides the basis to evaluate critically and develop a framework in the following parts.

2.2. Population and Sampling

As a conceptual research study, which is a qualitative desk-based investigation based on the systematic literature review, the conceptual study does not entail a human participant population or any empirical sampling, as opposed to a classical meaning. Rather, the population will consist of all pertinent peer-reviewed academic articles (articles, books, reports, and conference papers) published during the period below and above 2018 on AI-driven analytics, employee wellbeing, ethical implications, learning, assessment, and organizational psychology in the workplace settings. The research sampling was a purposive (non-probability) selection to identify and involve high-quality and relevant publications in major databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, PubMed) with targeted keywords and inclusion/exclusion criterion based on ethical aspects, the application of AI in HR/organization and wellbeing impacts. About 50-70 sources were filtered using PRISMA-inspired guidelines with a final corpus of about 40-50 rigorously selected works being the subject of thematic analysis. The method will provide a good coverage of interdisciplinary views without having to collect primary data using individuals and organizations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Analysis

The conceptual model shows that, although AI tools offer great promises for enhancing employee wellbeing, they have mainly negative effects on wellbeing via four interrelated ethical mediators (privacy erosion, algorithmic bias, lack of transparency, dehumanization).These mechanisms act in a cumulative and synergistic manner, which has a negative impact on employee psychological health, autonomy and job satisfaction, and strongly calls for robust ethical governance to mitigate such impacts and truly contribute to employee prosperity.

3.2 Findings

Table 1: Summary of Ethical Risk Pathways

S. N O	Mediator / Risk Factor	Direction of Influence	Primary Mechanism of Impact on Wellbeing
1	Privacy Erosion	Negative →	Constant monitoring → anxiety, loss of personal boundaries
2	Algorithmic Bias	Negative →	Unfair predictions → discrimination, inequity, resentment
3	Lack of Transparency	Negative →	Opaque decisions → distrust, helplessness, injustice
4	Dehumanization	Negative →	Automated interactions → emotional isolation, reduced empathy

(Source: Developed by the Authors based on Literature Review)

As presented in Table 1, AI-powered analytics is conceptualized as the independent variable, and there are four key independent variables that serve as mediators: Privacy Erosion, Algorithmic Bias, Lack of Transparency, and Dehumanization. All mediators directly reference Employee Wellbeing as the only outcome measure, indicating that this is the one that is at the greatest risk of negative psychological impact and loss of autonomy and flourishing. The warning tone is intentional, with no positive pathways included, highlighting the critical importance of these ethical risks and the need to ensure that AI is capable of positively contributing to employee wellbeing.

Table 2: Strength and Interconnections of the Mediators

Mediator	Strength of Negative Effect	Reinforces /Interacts With	Example Workplace Consequence
Privacy Erosion	High	Lack of Transparency,Dehumanization	Employees feel “watched 24/7” → chronic stress
Algorithmic Bias	High	Privacy Erosion (more data = more bias risk)	Certain groups flagged unfairly for burnout → alienation
Lack of Transparency	Very High	All other mediators	No explanation for “at-risk” label → eroded trust
Dehumanization	Moderate to High	Privacy Erosion + Lack of Transparency	Loss of human support → loneliness disengagement

(Source: Developed by the Authors based on Literature Review)

Table 2 further divides the diagnosis to give moderate-to-high and very high strength ratings to each ethical mediator, ensuring all these risks cannot be neglected in the real world of AI in HR. It introduces the notion of synergistic and reinforcing relationships between the various mediators, for example, the erosion of privacy leading to the reduction of transparency, which in turn can lead to the intensification of the harm, and which will have tangible consequences in the workplace, such as chronic stress, exclusion, lack of trust and isolation. Overall, the table serves as a reminder of the importance of grasping the compounding and organization-wide harm that these ethical failures bring to the wellbeing of employees, and for which, unless they are tackled with decisive action, they must wait until these issues are resolved.

Table 3: Risk Levels, Mitigation Priority, and Potential Outcomes

Ethical Mediator	Estimated Risk Level to Wellbeing	Mitigation Priority (High/ Medium/ Low)	Key Mitigation Strategy
Privacy Erosion	Very High	High	Strict data minimization, granular consent, anonymization
Algorithmic Bias	High	High	Regular bias audits, diverse training data, fairness metrics
Lack of Transparency	Very High	Very High	Explainable AI (XAI) techniques, decision logs
Dehumanization	High	High	Mandatory human-in-the-loop oversight, empathy training

(Source: Developed by the Authors based on Literature Review)

Table 3 is a synthesis of the conceptual model, which is a one-way warning: If ethics do not play a strong role in AI-driven analytics, then they are likely to mostly have a negative impact on employee wellbeing through converging pathways. It focuses on the cumulative and synergistic impact of the four mediators privacy erosion, algorithmic bias, lack of transparency and dehumanization that contribute to a greater effect of harm to trust, psychological safety and engagement. The table not only presents a diagnostic summary of the potential benefits and risks of AI but also serves as an urgent call to action, emphasizing the need for immediate action to ensure that these benefits are realized and mitigate risks in the practice of AI.

3.3 DISCUSSIONS

In the conceptual model and supporting tables, the AI-powered analytics and its associated mediators are shown to have the greatest negative impacts on wellbeing, primarily through four interrelated mediators: privacy erosion, algorithmic bias, lack of transparency, and dehumanization, which are key drivers of employee learning, assessment, and organizational psychology. These risks work together to exacerbate stress, distrust, inequity, emotional isolation; and turn a potentially helpful instrument into a source of emotional harm. The results corroborate previous studies that document the negative impacts of the use of AI and the need for ethical regulation to turn these negative trends around. The potential for employee flourishing through the use of artificial intelligence is yet to be fully realised without effective interventions like explainable AI, bias audits and human oversight. In conclusion, the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) requires a rethinking of the values that should be emphasized, with a particular focus on human dignity and psychological security.

4. Conclusion

While the concept of using AI in learning, assessment, and organisational psychology has transformative potential, the conceptual model shows that there are four interconnected ethical risks for employee wellbeing with these technologies: privacy risks, algorithmic bias, lack of transparency, and dehumanization. These mediators compound each other, leading to an increase of psychological safety, trust, autonomy and human connection deterioration. If left unchecked, such as without explainable AI, bias audits, human oversight and transparency in governing, AI systems can create an environment that is detrimental to productivity, stress, engagement, and inequity. To really enhance employee wellbeing, responsible adoption places human dignity and empathy and above efficiency.

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Language Policies and Teacher Strategies for Promoting Psychological Inclusiveness in the Diverse Classroom in Arab Education Zone

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of language policies on classroom inclusivity and the strategies employed by teachers to promote psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse secondary school classrooms in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted. Using stratified random sampling, 200 junior and senior secondary school teachers were selected. Data were collected via a structured four-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test; one-way ANOVA) at $\alpha = 0.05$. Language policies exerted limited practical influence on psychological inclusiveness (cluster mean = 2.48), revealing a persistent policy-practice gap. Teachers nonetheless employed diverse inclusive strategies including differentiated instruction, code-switching, and culturally responsive pedagogy (cluster mean = 2.79). Key implementation barriers included inadequate training, resource deficits, and weak administrative support (cluster mean = 2.67). No statistically significant differences in inclusive strategy use were found by gender ($t = 0.743$, $p = .458$) or teaching experience ($F = 1.032$, $p = .380$). This study contributes empirical evidence on the disconnect between language policy intent and classroom reality in a linguistically complex Nigerian urban zone, offering actionable insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators.

Keywords: Equity-oriented communication, Instructional adaptation, Learner belongingness, Multicultural pedagogy, Socio-emotional support

1. Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a transformative tool for social inclusion, national development, and individual empowerment. In recent years, the growing diversity of classrooms across the globe has intensified the importance of inclusive education an approach that emphasizes providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their background, abilities, or linguistic identities (UNESCO, 2020). In the Nigerian context, and particularly in Aba Education Zone of Abia State, classrooms are characterized by learners from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities who bring richly varied experiences to the learning environment. This diversity, while enriching, also presents substantial challenges to fostering psychological inclusiveness the condition in which every learner feels respected, valued, and fully engaged in the learning process (Okebukola, 2021).

Language policies play a significant role in shaping how inclusiveness is experienced within the classroom. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) stipulates the use of the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment as the medium of instruction during the early years of schooling, while English becomes the primary medium of instruction from upper primary school onwards. In practice, however, implementation of this policy has been inconsistent, especially in urban centers such as Aba, where multiple languages coexist. This inconsistency often creates barriers for learners from minority language backgrounds, generating feelings of exclusion and diminishing their willingness to participate in classroom activities (Olaoye & Ojebisi, 2022). Compounding these challenges, teachers frequently report inadequate preparation in multilingual pedagogy, limited access to instructional resources in indigenous languages, and institutional pressure to default to English-only instruction.

Teachers, as primary agents of learning, play a crucial mediating role in addressing these challenges. Through the deliberate adoption of inclusive strategies such as differentiated instruction, code-switching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and learner-centered approaches, teachers can create psychologically safe environments in which all learners feel genuinely included and academically supported (Gay, 2018; Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023). Research suggests, however, that many teachers in Nigeria face obstacles such as inadequate professional training, insufficient resources, and heavy curriculum demands that limit their capacity to implement inclusive practices effectively (Onyemelukwe & Okafor, 2021).

Psychological inclusiveness is vital in diverse classrooms because it not only fosters participation but also promotes self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and emotional well-being among learners (Umezinwa & Nwosu, 2020). When learners feel excluded or marginalized due to language barriers, the consequences extend beyond communication difficulties to negatively affect academic engagement, self-esteem, and overall achievement. Classrooms that are psychologically inclusive, on the other hand, enable learners to develop resilience, tolerance, and a sense of community (Ainscow, 2020).

In Aba Education Zone, where the cultural and linguistic mix is particularly rich, the interplay of language policies and teacher strategies is critical to achieving meaningful inclusiveness. A failure to address these dynamics risks reinforcing educational inequalities and hindering the holistic development of learners. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the extent to which language policies and teacher strategies contribute to psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms, identifies key barriers to implementation, and proposes practical recommendations for enhancing inclusive education in linguistically diverse settings.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In contemporary educational settings across Nigeria, diversity in language, culture, and learning needs is increasingly pronounced. Classrooms in Aba Education Zone reflect this diversity, accommodating learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. While such diversity can enrich the teaching-learning process, it simultaneously creates significant challenges for ensuring psychological inclusiveness among all students.

Despite the existence of a national language policy that advocates for mother tongue instruction in early education and English as the medium of instruction thereafter, evidence suggests that implementation remains inconsistent (Olaoye & Ojebisi, 2022). Students from minority language groups frequently experience exclusion, anxiety, and reduced classroom participation as a result of language barriers, leading to diminished academic engagement and adverse psychosocial outcomes including low self-esteem and social withdrawal (Umezinwa & Nwosu, 2020). Moreover, many teachers lack adequate training in inclusive pedagogical approaches or encounter systemic barriers that constrain their capacity to employ such strategies effectively (Onyemelukwe & Okafor, 2021).

This study therefore sought to investigate the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms within Aba Education Zone, and to identify the challenges and evidence-based solutions that can enhance equitable and inclusive education in the area.

1.2 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to investigate the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning in Aba Education Zone. The specific objectives were to:

- Examine the extent to which language policies influence psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning.
- Identify the teacher strategies used in promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.
- Determine the challenges teachers face in implementing language-inclusive practices.
- Investigate whether teacher strategies significantly differ by gender in promoting psychological inclusiveness.
- Assess the relationship between years of teaching experience and teachers’ use of inclusive strategies.
- Suggest effective practices for enhancing psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

- To what extent do language policies influence psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning in Aba Education Zone?
- What teacher strategies are employed in promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms?
- What challenges do teachers face in implementing language policies that enhance inclusiveness?
- Do teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness differ significantly by gender?
- How does teaching experience relate to the strategies teachers adopt for inclusiveness in diverse classrooms?
- What practices can be recommended for improving psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse classrooms?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H_{01}: There is no significant influence of language policies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.
- H_{02}: There is no significant difference in teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness based on gender.
- H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between teachers' years of experience and their use of inclusive strategies in diverse classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Policies and Psychological Inclusiveness

Language policies are fundamental in shaping educational experiences for linguistically diverse learners. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) provides a framework promoting mother tongue instruction in early education and English as the primary medium from upper primary onwards. However, scholars consistently highlight significant gaps between policy intent and classroom implementation. Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) documented that inadequate teacher preparation and a shortage of instructional materials in indigenous languages hinder effective mother tongue instruction in Nigerian classrooms. Consequently, students from minority language backgrounds frequently experience alienation and reduced participation, manifesting in weakened belonging and declining academic motivation (Mokibelo, Akinkurolere, & Mhindu, 2024).

Research demonstrates that flexible language policy implementation particularly through code-switching between English and indigenous languages yields improved learner outcomes. Jegede (2024) found that teachers employing code-switching strategies significantly reduced anxiety among language-minority students and enhanced classroom comprehension and confidence. Similarly, Adeyeye (2024) noted that policies exclusively promoting English as the medium of instruction contributed to psychological exclusion for children with limited English proficiency, particularly disadvantaging learners from minority linguistic backgrounds. These studies collectively indicate that language policies supporting mother tongue instruction, when properly implemented and adequately resourced, significantly enhance psychological inclusiveness.

2.2 Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness

Beyond policy frameworks, teacher agency proves decisive in creating psychologically inclusive learning environments. Multiple strategies have been identified as effective in diverse classroom contexts. Code-switching, recognized as a pedagogical bridge between students' home languages and the language of formal instruction, reassures learners and reduces language-related anxiety (Jegede, 2024). Culturally responsive pedagogy, which incorporates local proverbs, idioms, and cultural references into classroom discourse, enhances learners' sense of identity and belonging (Babazade, 2024; Gay, 2018).

Collaborative learning approaches, including group discussions and peer tutoring, foster psychological safety and mutual support, particularly benefiting students with weaker language skills (Kavita & Khritish, 2024). Differentiated instruction the practice of adapting lessons to meet diverse learning needs through simplified explanations, visual aids, and multilingual instructional resources reduces exclusion and supports all learners (Goyibova et al., 2025). Additionally, affective strategies such as demonstrating empathy, actively encouraging participation, and consistently validating diverse student opinions create emotionally supportive classroom environments that protect learner dignity and confidence (Gay, 2018; Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023).

2.3 Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Despite the availability of policy frameworks, teachers encounter substantial challenges in implementing inclusive strategies. Inadequate teacher preparation represents a major barrier: Phiri, Chanda, and Mwanapabu (2024) reported that many teachers lack training in bilingual or multilingual pedagogy, leaving them unprepared to implement mother tongue-based instruction or code-switching techniques effectively. In contexts such as Aba Education Zone, where multiple indigenous languages and dialects coexist, the challenge of selecting an appropriate instructional medium is particularly complex.

Resource constraints significantly impede inclusive practice. Chukwukere and Ajileye (2024) and Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) documented critical shortages of textbooks, instructional materials, and assessment tools in indigenous languages. Without adequate resources, teachers often default to English-only instruction, undermining inclusiveness. Institutional attitudes present additional obstacles: Sumartana, Hudiananingsih, and Rouf (2025) revealed that many parents and school administrators resist mother tongue instruction, perceiving it as educationally inferior to English. Such societal preferences exert pressure on teachers to abandon inclusive multilingual practices. Furthermore, large class sizes and overloaded curricula limit teachers' ability to individualize instruction (Vakili et al., 2024).

2.4 Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Research on gender variations in teacher strategies produces mixed findings. Zahir, Tofail, and Mussaddiq (2025) found that female teachers were more likely to employ affective and relational strategies, such as verbal encouragement and emotional empathy, compared to male counterparts, and that these differences correlated with greater perceived psychological inclusiveness. However, Imran, Sultan, and Ali (2024) and Ahmad, Ziad, and Heather (2019) reported no significant variation between male and female teachers in the adoption of core instructional strategies such as code-switching, differentiated instruction, or collaborative learning. These findings collectively suggest that gender influences the socio-emotional dimensions of inclusive practice more substantially than core instructional techniques.

2.5 Teaching Experience and Inclusive Practices

Experienced teachers generally demonstrate greater capacity for implementing inclusive strategies. Dioquino and Paglinawan (2025) reported that teachers with over ten years of experience were more adept at integrating local languages and cultural knowledge into instruction and more sensitive to the individual needs of diverse learners. Graham et al. (2020) similarly found that experienced teachers demonstrated greater confidence in managing diverse classrooms and employed a broader range of inclusive strategies.

By contrast, early-career teachers often adhered more rigidly to prescribed curricula, giving insufficient attention to student diversity (Leite, Go, & Havu-Nuutinen, 2020). However, Stumbriene, Jevsikova, and Kontvaine (2024) noted that younger teachers may bring innovative technology-based language support methods, suggesting that the relationship between experience and inclusive practice is moderated by openness to professional innovation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for systematically documenting the attitudes, practices, and perceptions of teachers regarding language policies and inclusive strategies without experimental manipulation of variables.

It permits the collection of data from a broad sample in a relatively efficient manner, facilitating both descriptive and inferential analysis.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised all junior and senior secondary school teachers in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, who are directly involved in classroom instruction and policy implementation. A sample of 200 teachers was drawn from the population using stratified random sampling. Schools were stratified according to location (urban and rural), and teachers were randomly selected from each stratum to ensure proportional and representative coverage.

3.3 Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections: Section A collected demographic information (gender, years of experience, subject area); Section B contained items on the role of language policies in promoting inclusiveness; and Section C contained items on teacher strategies for fostering psychological inclusiveness. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The deliberate exclusion of a midpoint was intended to elicit definitive responses from participants.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was subjected to content validity review by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. Validity was confirmed through expert judgment, and minor revisions were incorporated based on reviewers' feedback. Reliability was established through a pilot test administered to 10 teachers outside the study area. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were employed to answer the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting mean scores was: 3.50-4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49 = Agree; 1.50-2.49 = Disagree; 1.00-1.49 = Strongly Disagree. A benchmark mean of 2.50 was used to determine the extent of agreement. Inferential statistics were applied to test the hypotheses: an independent samples t-test was used for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (involving two groups), and a one-way ANOVA was applied for Hypothesis 3 (involving multiple experience groups), all at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. Results

4.1 Influence of Language Policies on Psychological Inclusiveness

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing the influence of language policies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on How Language Policies Influence Psychological Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The current language policy in Nigeria enhances inclusiveness in classrooms.	2.19	0.93	Low Extent

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
2	The use of English as the official medium of instruction promotes fairness among students.	2.51	0.95	High Extent
3	The use of mother tongue in early education supports learners' confidence and participation.	1.98	0.86	Low Extent
4	Inconsistent implementation of language policies creates psychological barriers for students.	1.95	0.96	Low Extent
5	Minority language students often feel excluded in classrooms dominated by English.	1.84	0.99	Low Extent
6	Language policies in Nigeria adequately address the needs of linguistically diverse learners.	2.90	0.84	High Extent
7	Lack of clear implementation guidelines for language policies affects classroom inclusiveness.	2.28	0.83	Low Extent
8	Teachers are adequately informed about national language policies.	3.29	0.91	High Extent
9	Language policies encourage equal participation of all students in classroom activities.	3.30	0.66	High Extent
10	Language policies have a direct impact on students' sense of belonging in the classroom.	2.65	0.83	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	2.48	0.50	Low Extent

The results in Table 1 reveal a mixed pattern of responses. Teachers reported high extent of agreement for items 2, 6, 8, 9, and 10, indicating that they perceive language policies as encouraging equal participation and that teachers are generally aware of national policies. However, items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 received low-extent ratings, suggesting that the current language policy does not adequately enhance classroom inclusiveness, that mother tongue instruction is underutilized, and that inconsistent implementation creates psychological barriers. The cluster mean of 2.48 (SD = 0.50) falls marginally below the benchmark of 2.50, indicating that language policies collectively exert limited influence on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms in Aba Education Zone. This finding reveals a critical paradox: while teachers are aware of policies and believe they theoretically encourage participation, the practical implementation of those policies does not translate into a psychologically inclusive classroom environment.

4.2 Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11	I adapt my teaching strategies to meet the language needs of all learners.	2.70	1.00	Agree
12	I use code-switching (switching between English and mother tongue) to aid inclusiveness.	2.19	0.90	Disagree
13	I employ culturally responsive teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners.	2.71	1.05	Agree
14	I encourage peer learning among students from different language backgrounds.	2.51	0.85	Agree
15	I simplify instructional language to ensure all learners can understand.	2.90	0.93	Agree
16	I use visual aids, charts, and demonstrations to overcome language barriers.	2.90	1.02	Agree
17	I deliberately create classroom discussions that value every student's contribution.	2.98	1.20	Agree
18	I adjust lesson delivery to accommodate slow learners.	3.33	0.78	Agree
19	I provide psychological support to students who feel excluded.	2.76	0.93	Agree
20	I use group activities to foster cooperation among linguistically diverse students.	2.92	1.04	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.79	0.50	Agree

Table 2 shows that teachers reported employing a range of inclusive strategies in diverse classrooms. All items except Item 12 (code-switching, mean = 2.19) received agreement ratings above the 2.50 benchmark. Notably, adjusting lesson delivery for slow learners recorded the highest mean score (3.33), while the use of code-switching recorded the lowest (2.19). The cluster mean of 2.79 (SD = 0.50) indicates that teachers broadly agree that they adopt diverse inclusive strategies in their classrooms. However, the notably low mean for code-switching represents a significant missed opportunity, given the demonstrated effectiveness of this strategy in reducing language-related anxiety and enhancing comprehension among minority-language students.

4.3 Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Table 3 presents mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive practices.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Challenges Teachers Face in Promoting Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Lack of training on inclusive teaching practices affects my effectiveness.	2.68	0.90	Agree
22	Large class sizes make it difficult to promote inclusiveness.	2.49	0.88	Agree
23	Pressure to complete the curriculum reduces my ability to apply inclusive strategies.	2.45	0.94	Disagree
24	Insufficient teaching resources hinder my ability to support all learners.	2.96	0.80	Agree
25	Some students resist participating because of language barriers.	2.66	0.80	Agree
26	Teachers are often not given professional development opportunities on inclusiveness.	2.98	0.87	Agree
27	Lack of support from school administrators makes inclusiveness difficult.	2.64	0.84	Agree
28	I find it difficult to balance language policy requirements with classroom realities.	2.65	0.89	Agree
29	Students from minority language groups are often marginalized in assessments.	2.59	0.98	Agree
30	Implementing inclusiveness requires more support than teachers currently receive.	2.62	0.94	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.67	0.36	Agree

The results in Table 3 indicate that teachers face multiple significant barriers to implementing inclusive practices. With the exception of Item 23 (curriculum pressure, mean = 2.45), all items met or exceeded the 2.50 benchmark. The highest-rated challenges were insufficient teaching resources (mean = 2.96) and lack of professional development (mean = 2.98), highlighting critical systemic deficiencies. The cluster mean of 2.67 (SD = 0.36) confirms that teachers broadly agree that systemic barriers impede the implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Influence of Language Policies on Inclusiveness

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test for Language Policy Influence on Psychological Inclusiveness

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Language Policy Influence on Inclusiveness	1.847	198	.066	Not Significant
Policy Awareness vs. Implementation Gap	6.312	198	.000	Significant

The t-test results in Table 4 show that language policies do not exert a statistically significant influence on psychological inclusiveness ($t = 1.847$, $df = 198$, $p = .066 > .05$). H_{01} is therefore retained. However, the analysis also revealed a highly significant gap between policy awareness and implementation ($t = 6.312$, $df = 198$, $p < .001$), confirming that while teachers are knowledgeable about language policies, this knowledge does not translate into inclusive classroom outcomes. This finding underscores the distinction between policy existence and effective policy enactment.

Hypothesis 2: Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Male vs. Female Teacher Strategies	0.743	198	.458	Not Significant
Affective Strategy Use (Male vs. Female)	1.221	198	.224	Not Significant

Table 5 reveals no statistically significant difference in the inclusive strategies adopted by male and female teachers ($t = 0.743$, $df = 198$, $p = .458 > .05$). H_{02} is retained. Nor was there a significant difference in affective strategy use between male and female teachers ($t = 1.221$, $df = 198$, $p = .224$). Both male and female teachers in Aba Education Zone appear to employ comparable approaches to promoting psychological inclusiveness, suggesting that gender is not a primary determinant of inclusive practice in this context.

Hypothesis 3: Teaching Experience and Inclusive Strategy Use

Table 6: One-Way ANOVA for Teaching Experience and Use of Inclusive Strategies

Variable	F-value	df	p-value	Decision
Teaching Experience (0-5 years)	1.032	3,196	.380	Not Significant
Teaching Experience (6-10 years)	0.987	3,196	.400	Not Significant
Teaching Experience (11+ years)	1.145	3,196	.331	Not Significant

The ANOVA results presented in Table 6 indicate no statistically significant difference in inclusive strategy use across experience groups ($F = 1.032$, $df = 3,196$, $p = .380 > .05$). H_{03} is therefore retained. Teachers with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11 or more years of experience did not differ significantly in their use of inclusive strategies. This finding suggests that the systemic barriers identified in Research Question 3 inadequate training, resource scarcity, and limited administrative support affect teachers uniformly, regardless of their years of experience.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 Language Policies and Psychological Inclusiveness

The finding that language policies exert limited influence on psychological inclusiveness (cluster mean = 2.48) reveals a critical paradox at the heart of Nigerian educational practice: while policies formally exist and teachers are broadly aware of them, their practical implementation contributes minimally to creating psychologically safe and inclusive classrooms. This finding aligns closely with research by Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) and Mokibelo, Akinkurolere, and Mhindu (2024), who documented persistent implementation gaps between Nigeria's National Policy on Education and classroom reality. The awareness-practice discrepancy where teachers report high agreement with items on policy awareness (mean = 3.29) and equal participation (mean = 3.30) yet acknowledge limited actual inclusiveness suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to drive inclusive outcomes. Policy implementation must be actively supported through training, resources, and administrative accountability.

Teacher Strategies and Agency

Despite the constraints imposed by systemic inadequacies, teachers demonstrated commendable agency in employing diverse inclusive strategies. The cluster mean of 2.79 across Strategy items reflects genuine professional commitment to inclusiveness. The adoption of differentiated instruction (mean = 3.33), visual aids (mean = 2.90), simplified language (mean = 2.90), and inclusive classroom discussions (mean = 2.98) corroborates research by Gay (2018) and Adeyemi and Alabi (2023) regarding the effectiveness of culturally responsive and learner-centered pedagogies. These findings affirm that teachers are not passive recipients of systemic failures but active agents who exercise professional judgment in the interest of their students.

Nevertheless, the underutilization of code-switching (mean = 2.19) is a significant and concerning finding. Code-switching has been consistently demonstrated to reduce language anxiety and improve comprehension among minority-language learners (Jegede, 2024). Its low adoption in Aba classrooms may reflect inadequate professional training in multilingual pedagogy, institutional resistance to the use of indigenous languages, or teachers' limited confidence in deploying this strategy. Addressing this gap through targeted professional development in code-switching and multilingual instructional techniques is therefore a priority.

5.2 Barriers to Inclusive Practice

The identification of systemic barriers (cluster mean = 2.67) confirms that teachers operate within constrained institutional environments. Insufficient teaching resources (mean = 2.96) and the absence of regular professional development (mean = 2.98) represent the most critical bottlenecks. These findings align with Chukwukere and Ajileye (2024) and Phiri, Chanda, and Mwanapabu (2024), who documented resource scarcity and training deficiencies as major impediments to inclusive practice in similar African educational contexts. The reported difficulty in balancing language policy requirements with classroom realities (mean = 2.65) suggests that policy mandates and the practical realities of diverse classrooms are not sufficiently aligned, generating tensions that undermine teachers' efforts. Addressing these barriers requires sustained institutional investment rather than relying solely on individual teacher resilience.

5.3 Gender, Experience, and Inclusive Practice

The absence of statistically significant differences by gender or teaching experience challenges commonly held assumptions about these variables as predictors of inclusive teaching. The finding that male and female teachers employ comparable strategies aligns with Imran, Sultan, and Ali (2024), who found no gender variation in core instructional approaches. Meanwhile, the absence of experience-based differences is noteworthy given that Dioquino and Paglinawan (2025) found experienced teachers to be more adept at integrating local knowledge. In Aba's educational context, the systemic barriers of training deficits, resource scarcity, and limited administrative support appear to affect all teachers regardless of gender or experience, underscoring the primary importance of structural rather than individual factors in determining the quality of inclusive practice.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The Federal and State Ministries of Education should develop clear, detailed implementation guidelines for the National Policy on Education, with specific protocols for managing linguistic diversity in multilingual classroom settings such as those found in Aba Education Zone.
- Teacher education programs at all levels should incorporate comprehensive training in multilingual pedagogy, culturally responsive instruction, and code-switching strategies, to adequately prepare teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms.
- State and federal government agencies should substantially increase investment in the production and distribution of instructional materials and assessment tools in Nigerian indigenous languages, to support mother tongue-based instruction and reduce reliance on English-only teaching.
- School administrators and local education authorities should create regular professional development opportunities for in-service teachers, with a specific focus on inclusive strategies, psychological inclusiveness, and the management of language diversity in the classroom.
- Curriculum planners should review and adjust curriculum demands to create the flexibility necessary for teachers to implement inclusive, learner-centered strategies without compromising coverage of required content.

- School communities including parents, teachers, and administrators should engage in structured dialogue about the value of mother tongue instruction and multilingual pedagogy as complementary to, rather than in conflict with, national goals for English proficiency.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms in Aba Education Zone, Abia State. The findings demonstrate a persistent and concerning gap between the intent of Nigeria's national language policy and its practical implementation in classroom settings. Although teachers demonstrate awareness of inclusive pedagogies and actively employ a range of strategies, language policies alone contribute minimally to psychological inclusiveness due to systemic implementation failures. Teachers operate as constrained professional agents within systems marked by inadequate training, resource scarcity, and insufficient institutional support. Crucially, these systemic barriers affect all teachers regardless of gender or experience, reinforcing the conclusion that structural rather than individual factors are the primary determinants of inclusive practice. The study underscores the urgency of coherent, well-resourced, and contextualized policy implementation that moves beyond rhetoric to tangible support for teachers and learners alike. Strengthening multilingual teacher education, investing in indigenous language resources, and fostering administratively supportive school environments are essential steps toward realizing the promise of psychologically inclusive education in Nigeria's diverse classrooms. The implications of this study extend beyond Aba Education Zone, offering transferable insights for other linguistically complex educational contexts in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa.

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Cognitive Science, Innovation and Ethical Accountability: Managerial Implications for Modern Educational Institutions

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Abstract: The proposed conceptual model presented in this paper needs to be tested in real-life settings within the educational sector, specifically within the field of higher education, and future empirical research should carry out validation against practical institutional data. The relationship between cognitive innovation, ethical leadership, and institutional performance could be explored via quantitative methods based on structural equation modelling. Policymakers need to develop special regulatory guidelines governing how neuro-data can be collected and used in educational facilities. Meanwhile, the use of AI and behavioural data could be monitored through the creation of ethics committees within institutions. Leadership training programmes that include model decisions on ethical issues and cognitive sciences can significantly enhance leadership skills. Cross-cultural studies can determine the role of ethical responsibility within different educational systems internationally. By advancing the innovation agenda responsibly, higher education institutions will regain the confidence of their stakeholders through a commitment to sustainable development combined with cognitive innovation.

Keywords: Cognitive science, educational management, ethical accountability, institutional leadership, pedagogical innovation

1. Introduction

The paradigm shift in the existing educational environment is driven by a convergence of technological advances, interdisciplinary knowledge-building, and heightened institutional demands for accountability and transparency. Among the most transformative developments in contemporary educational management is the purposeful integration of cognitive science into both pedagogical design and administrative decision-making at all institutional levels. Cognitive science, in conjunction with psychology and neuroscience, provides a rigorous scientific framework for understanding how individuals process information, regulate their emotions, and generate and retain knowledge across diverse learning contexts (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). This growing body of interdisciplinary knowledge is increasingly shaping not only the educational process itself but also the management practices within educational institutions at all levels of the system. Modern learning institutions are highly complex organisations that require moral leadership, strategic innovation management, and evidence-based operational decision-making to remain effective, competitive, and socially responsive in a rapidly evolving global educational landscape.

Cognitive concepts such as spaced learning, metacognition, retrieval practice, and emotional engagement have contributed substantially to improvements in teaching effectiveness over recent decades (Dunlosky et al., 2013). However, the implications of cognitive science extend well beyond the design of individual lessons or courses. They directly inform the policies governing faculty development, curriculum design processes, institutional strategy formation, and comprehensive student engagement and support initiatives. As educational institutions transition into increasingly data-rich operational environments, behavioural knowledge and learning analytics are becoming essential inputs to strategic managerial decisions (Siemens & Baker, 2012). Innovation in education with respect to artificial intelligence, adaptive learning systems, and neuro-assessment technologies has opened substantial new possibilities for real-time performance analysis and personalised learning pathway design. However, this same educational innovation simultaneously presents significant ethical challenges, among which are threats to student autonomy, data privacy rights, and the procedural fairness of algorithmic judgments in assessment and academic progression decisions (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Consequently, a careful and conscientious balance between innovation and ethical responsibility is required in order to maintain institutional legitimacy and sustainable stakeholder trust over time.

Educational administrators operate within intersecting frameworks of governance, stakeholder management, resource allocation, and institutional performance analysis. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), ethical responsibility in educational leadership is inextricably linked to the psychological well-being of all institutional community members, equitable access to emerging technologies and learning resources, and robust transparency in data management and institutional communication practices. Administrators must therefore establish stringent and clearly communicated ethical guidelines for the collection, storage, and use of behavioural and cognitive data in order to develop neuro-educational approaches in a manner that genuinely respects and protects the rights and dignity of students and staff at all levels of the institution.

Moreover, leadership grounded in cognitive and organisational behaviour principles, including emotional intelligence, self-regulatory awareness, and empathetic communication, has significant potential to enhance employee motivation and strengthen organisational culture in educational institutions (Goleman, 1998). Educational organisations are positioned to enhance their institutional performance and establish flexible, adaptive learning environments by systematically incorporating cognitive science principles into leadership training, talent development, and succession planning processes. Nevertheless, the academic and professional literature regarding the managerial implications of cognitive science-informed innovation within ethical governance systems in education remains limited, fragmented, and insufficiently theorised. This paper, therefore, addresses this significant research gap by systematically examining the nexus between cognitive science-informed educational innovation and managerial and ethical accountability in higher education. By exploring the interconnections between educational management practice, moral institutional duty, and evidence-based innovation, the gap in the existing scholarly research is meaningfully addressed, and a practical interdisciplinary conceptual framework is proposed for future empirical validation and practical application by educational leaders and policymakers.

The relevance of this inquiry extends beyond academic interest. Globally, governments, accreditation bodies, and funding agencies are placing increasing emphasis on institutional accountability, evidence-based pedagogical outcomes, and the ethical deployment of educational technologies. Institutions that lack coherent frameworks for navigating this complex territory risk regulatory non-compliance, loss of accreditation standing, and the erosion of public trust. By establishing a conceptual foundation that integrates cognitive science with ethical governance and innovation management, this paper provides both a diagnostic lens for identifying institutional gaps and a prescriptive framework for guiding institutional reform. The practical implications of this work are therefore significant for educational leaders, policymakers, academic researchers, and all those responsible for the governance and strategic direction of contemporary higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

Cognitive science, with its central emphasis on active learning, memory consolidation, emotional involvement, and metacognitive awareness, has been profoundly influential in shaping modern educational theory, curriculum design, and pedagogical practice. Research consistently demonstrates that retrieval practice and spaced repetition are among the most powerful evidence-based strategies for enhancing long-term retention of complex knowledge (Dunlosky et al., 2013). Emotional-cognitive integration has also been empirically demonstrated to enhance meaningful and deep learning in ways that sustain intrinsic motivation and support lasting academic engagement among learners across diverse educational levels (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). These research insights have influenced progressive learning institutions to critically re-evaluate and revise their established programmes and methods of instruction, transitioning away from passive, rote-learning models towards evidence-based pedagogical frameworks explicitly grounded in cognitive and affective research findings.

The current body of literature concerning innovation management highlights the critical necessity of strategic, visionary, and adaptive leadership in ensuring effective technological adoption and meaningful innovation in educational practice. Fullan (2016) argues persuasively that systemic educational innovation requires institutional leadership capable of organising, aligning, communicating, and sustaining innovation agendas in coherent accordance with the overarching strategic aims and deeply held values of the institution. Learning analytics platforms and AI-based academic performance systems are increasingly utilised in order to track individual student progress, identify academically at-risk students in real time, and generate predictive forecasts of long-term student academic outcomes (Siemens & Baker, 2012). Despite the demonstrable efficiency gains these systems offer, persistent and well-documented concerns about algorithmic bias, disproportionate surveillance of vulnerable student groups, and the potential commodification of sensitive educational data continue to challenge their widespread ethical adoption across the sector (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). These unresolved tensions underscore the urgent need for robust institutional governance frameworks capable of guiding the responsible, equitable, and transparent integration of emerging technology platforms within complex educational settings.

Ethical leadership theories, as persuasively articulated by Brown and Treviño (2006), emphasise the foundational significance of institutional accountability, procedural fairness, role-modelling of ethical conduct, and the cultivation of meaningful stakeholder participation in all major institutional decision-making processes. Guaranteeing student rights, promoting genuinely equitable access to high-quality learning resources, and actively safeguarding the interests of all institutional stakeholders are consistently identified as non-negotiable elements of ethical leadership practice in the learning environment (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Issues of informed consent, clarity regarding data ownership, and the potential for misuse of sensitive neurotechnological and behavioural data are increasingly central concerns as educational institutions explore the more sophisticated and intrusive applications of brain-based monitoring technologies, wearable cognitive sensors, and AI-powered personalised learning management systems.

Organisational learning theory, as seminally developed by Argyris and Schön (1996), argues that organisations which genuinely embrace evidence-based, reflective, and double-loop innovation processes are substantially better positioned to adapt effectively and sustainably to structural, environmental, and regulatory change. However, unethical or poorly governed approaches to institutional innovation frequently undermine an institution's credibility, particularly when stakeholders perceive that their fundamental interests, rights, and dignity are not being adequately safeguarded by institutional leaders. Responsible innovation, as conceptualised in the growing interdisciplinary research literature, necessarily involves transparent and ongoing stakeholder engagement, clearly articulated and enforceable ethical guidelines, and robust ongoing mechanisms for independent institutional accountability (Stahl et al., 2017). Educational institutions that successfully embed such principles into the DNA of their innovation governance structures are demonstrably more likely to sustain long-term stakeholder support, public legitimacy, and the institutional trust essential to pursuing ambitious educational goals.

Despite significant advances in the application of cognitive science within educational contexts, important gaps remain in how institutions translate cognitive research findings into coherent institutional governance policies. The journey from neuroscientific discovery to sustainable institutional practice is complex, non-linear, and fraught with implementation challenges that are rarely addressed in the existing literature. Institutional inertia, resource constraints, and resistance to evidence-based reform among established academic communities can significantly impede the adoption of cognitively-informed management practices even when the research evidence is compelling and readily accessible. The management literature increasingly recognises that successful innovation implementation requires not only technical capacity but also cultural readiness, distributed leadership support, and sustained long-term institutional commitment that goes far beyond the adoption of isolated pedagogical techniques or technology platforms.

The intersection between cognitive science, innovation management, and ethical accountability frameworks remains a notably underexplored and theoretically underdeveloped area in both the management and education scholarly literatures. Even though neuro-education has demonstrated considerable promise in increasing learning effectiveness and enabling more sophisticated pedagogical personalisation, substantially more research is necessary to fully understand and systematically codify its managerial implications within formal institutional governance structures and leadership development frameworks. The existing literature consistently tends to treat cognitive science, innovation management, and educational ethics as largely separate disciplinary domains rather than as deeply interacting and mutually reinforcing dimensions of integrated institutional leadership. This paper therefore makes a distinctive and timely contribution by working systematically towards bridging this significant interdisciplinary gap, offering a synthesised conceptual framework that integrates these three domains into a coherent and practically applicable model of responsible educational management.

3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a conceptual research design supported by qualitative secondary data analysis, a methodological approach well-suited to the development of integrative theoretical frameworks in complex, multidisciplinary research areas where primary empirical data collection may be premature prior to adequate theorisation. The research draws upon peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional policy documents, and interdisciplinary scholarly studies published between 2007 and 2024. Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used as the primary academic databases to identify and systematically retrieve relevant literature on cognitive science in education, educational innovation and technology management, ethical leadership, and institutional governance. A disciplined and systematic approach was followed throughout the literature search process, using Boolean logical operators to combine key search terms including cognitive science, educational management, ethical accountability, neuroeducation, learning analytics, algorithmic governance, and institutional leadership. Literature not available in English-language peer-reviewed outlets was excluded from the analysis in order to maintain consistent scholarly rigour and ensure methodological comparability across diverse sources.

The analytical methodology adopted for this research is thematic analysis, conducted in accordance with the established and widely validated framework for rigorous qualitative data synthesis. In the first stage, the retrieved literature was systematically clustered into three major thematic categories: (1) cognitive science in education and its direct pedagogical and managerial applications; (2) innovation and technology management processes and challenges in educational institutions; and (3) ethical accountability frameworks and their operationalisation in institutional leadership practice. In the second stage, cross-thematic analysis was conducted systematically to identify and map the conceptual linkages and interdependencies between these three thematic domains, enabling the construction of a coherent, integrated, and practically applicable managerial framework suitable for application and future empirical testing in higher education institutional contexts.

To enhance conceptual validity and analytical rigour, the research employs organisational behaviour theory and ethical leadership theory as its primary and complementary conceptual lenses, providing a strong and well-established theoretical grounding for the interpretive synthesis undertaken. Key conceptual constructs such as cognitive science-informed decision-making, strategic innovation adoption processes, ethical governance framework design, and inclusive stakeholder engagement practices were systematically mapped onto the proposed conceptual framework through an iterative and reflective analytical process. The framework proposes that educational innovation informed by cognitive science shapes institutional performance and stakeholder outcomes primarily through the critical mediating influence of ethical leadership practices, governance transparency mechanisms, and responsible data management systems embedded at the institutional level.

It is also worth noting that the conceptual framework proposed in this paper draws explicitly on the principle of methodological pluralism, recognising that the complex, socially embedded phenomena of educational management and ethical governance cannot be adequately understood through any single disciplinary lens or research methodology. The integration of cognitive science perspectives with management theory and ethical leadership frameworks is itself a methodological stance that challenges the artificial disciplinary boundaries that have historically constrained progress in educational management research. By deliberately crossing these disciplinary boundaries, this research adopts what might be termed a genuinely integrative scholarly approach, one that mirrors the interdisciplinary nature of the institutional challenges it seeks to address. Future researchers are encouraged to adopt similarly pluralistic methodological frameworks, combining cognitive science measurement approaches, organisational behaviour instruments, and ethical audit methodologies to develop a richer and more practically useful evidence base for educational management practice.

The study acknowledges its inherent limitations, principally the reliance on secondary data sources and the corresponding absence of primary empirical validation drawn from direct institutional fieldwork or survey-based data collection. However, conceptual synthesis of this rigorous and systematic kind provides a sound and theoretically robust foundation upon which future empirical studies can productively build, refining and empirically testing the proposed relationships through well-designed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method research designs. The research deliberately draws upon a thorough combination of psychology, education policy, and management theories through a genuinely multidisciplinary analytical approach, ensuring that the resulting conceptual framework possesses both the scholarly rigour appropriate to academic publication and the genuine practical relevance required to be immediately useful to working educational administrators, institutional policymakers, and leadership development practitioners across diverse national and institutional contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the thematic analysis reveal that cognitive science-based innovations exert considerable and multidimensional influence over managerial operations in learning institutions across multiple critical dimensions of institutional functioning. The analysis identifies three primary domains in which cognitive science-informed innovation is actively reshaping educational management: (1) strategic planning and curriculum governance, (2) leadership development and human resource management, and (3) technology integration and ethical oversight governance. Each of these domains presents both significant opportunities for institutional enhancement and serious ethical responsibilities that demand thoughtful and proactive managerial attention from educational administrators at all levels.

In the domain of strategic planning and curriculum governance, evidence-based teaching frameworks explicitly grounded in cognitive research are increasingly being systematically incorporated into formal long-term institutional planning processes. Neuroscience-based pedagogical strategies deployed in schools and universities have demonstrated a significant and replicable capacity to enhance measurable student engagement, improve knowledge retention across academic disciplines, and strengthen both short-term and long-term academic outcomes (Dunlosky et al., 2013). Institutions that have successfully embedded strategic plans built consciously around cognitive science principles consistently report not only markedly improved student performance metrics but also greater levels of faculty professional satisfaction and significantly more coherent and purposeful curricular alignment across departments and programmes. These forward-looking institutions are systematically and deliberately replacing intuition-driven curriculum planning processes with rigorously evidence-based frameworks that explicitly account for how students actually learn, process complex information, develop critical and creative thinking capacities, and build transferable competencies over extended time frames.

Adaptive and high-performing organisational cultures are increasingly being developed and sustained through carefully designed leadership development programmes that explicitly incorporate emotional intelligence development and cognitive awareness-building modules as core elements (Goleman, 1998). Supervisors and institutional administrators who develop a working and practically applicable understanding of motivational processes, cognitive load management theory, group decision-making dynamics, and the nature and consequences of cognitive biases are demonstrably more effective and responsive in their complex institutional leadership roles. Research evidence consistently indicates that cognitively informed managers make more equitable and transparent institutional decisions, demonstrate substantially greater adaptability and resilience in response to institutional change and external disruption, and contribute far more positively to faculty and staff performance, professional development, and occupational morale. This evidence base powerfully reinforces the strategic value of integrating cognitive science principles systematically into human resource management frameworks, professional development programmes, and leadership pipeline cultivation strategies within educational institutions of all sizes and types.

Although technology-driven innovation offers significant operational efficiencies and pedagogical enhancement possibilities, it simultaneously introduces serious moral implications and ethical dilemmas that educational administrators must actively anticipate, acknowledge, and address. AI-based learning analytics systems enhance the predictive validity of academic performance assessments and facilitate the design of genuinely personalised and responsive learning pathways for individual students. However, these same powerful systems simultaneously raise profound and practically urgent concerns around data privacy and security, the disproportionate surveillance of already-disadvantaged student groups, and the very real and well-documented risk of algorithmic bias perpetuating or actively amplifying existing structural inequalities in educational access and attainment (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Institutions that deploy AI-driven personalisation and assessment systems without robust and independently audited ethical oversight frameworks are at serious risk of inadvertently exacerbating existing disadvantages for already marginalised, vulnerable, or non-traditional student groups. Transparent and publicly communicated data governance policies, genuine and inclusive stakeholder engagement processes, and formally constituted ethics accountability structures provide the most effective and sustainable means of mitigating these substantial challenges and ensuring that technological innovation genuinely serves the educational and social mission of the institution.

A further dimension of significant managerial relevance that emerges from the thematic synthesis concerns the critical role of middle leadership, a level of institutional governance that has historically been neglected in both cognitive science and innovation management literatures. Department heads, programme coordinators, faculty advisers, and team leaders occupy a strategic position at the interface between institutional governance structures and frontline educational practice. Their ability to translate institutional ethical commitments and cognitive science-informed pedagogical frameworks into daily departmental practice is decisive in determining whether institutional innovations produce the quality improvements intended or remain as aspirational policy statements that fail to penetrate the operational culture of the institution. Investing in the cognitive and ethical leadership capacity of middle leaders therefore represents one of the highest-return institutional development strategies available to senior educational administrators committed to sustainable, evidence-based institutional transformation.

The thematic analysis further demonstrates, with considerable consistency across the reviewed literature, that institutional management approaches actively informed by cognitive science enhance the overall resilience, sustainability, and adaptive capacity of educational organisations over the medium and long term.

However, ethical accountability in this context is not merely operationally desirable or reputationally advantageous but is an absolutely essential dimension of responsible and sustainable institutional governance. Institutions in which governance structures systematically lack meaningful ethical oversight mechanisms commonly experience progressive deterioration in stakeholder trust, serious reputational damage, significant difficulties in attracting and retaining both academically strong students and high-quality faculty, and ultimately a decline in their competitive institutional positioning. The organisational learning literature firmly affirms that institutions with deeply embedded reflective practices and genuine commitment to double-loop learning are significantly better positioned to adapt constructively to structural and environmental change, and to learn productively from both their demonstrable successes and their institutional failures (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Brown and Treviño (2006) confirm empirically that ethical leadership practices are strongly and consistently positively associated with enhanced institutional sustainability performance, improved employee commitment, and higher levels of genuine stakeholder trust across diverse institutional contexts.

The conceptual analysis also highlights an important implication for institutional communications and public engagement strategies. Institutions that proactively communicate their ethical governance commitments, data stewardship principles, and evidence-based pedagogical innovations to students, families, faculty, employers, and the wider public are demonstrably more successful in building and maintaining the social legitimacy essential to long-term institutional health. Trust is not generated by innovation alone; it is built through the consistent demonstration of ethical intentions and responsible governance behaviours over time. Educational institutions that invest in transparent reporting, independent audit mechanisms, and genuine stakeholder dialogue create the institutional conditions in which ambitious innovation can be pursued without sacrificing the foundational trust relationships that underpin institutional legitimacy and social impact.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The study findings confirm that the critical mediating variables between ambitious educational innovation and sustained, credible institutional success are ethical leadership, transparent and independently verifiable governance structures, and meaningful and inclusive stakeholder engagement processes at all levels of institutional decision-making. Education managers must demonstrably model responsible data management and provide principled ethical stewardship of all cognitive and behavioural data in order to effectively promote student and staff well-being alongside core institutional performance and strategic development goals. The distinctive contribution made by this study to the existing body of management and education scholarship lies principally in its rigorous and systematic interdisciplinary approach to linking insights from cognitive science with the demands of ethical governance in the specific and complex context of institutional educational leadership.

The study has conclusively demonstrated that cognitive science is highly significant in both the educational process and the managerial dimensions of innovation adoption within higher education institutions. Institutions that purposefully utilise neuroscience-based approaches to curriculum design, student support, and pedagogical practice, and that deliberately embed cognitive science principles into their governance, leadership, and management frameworks, consistently achieve measurably better student learning outcomes, stronger faculty engagement, and greater overall institutional sustainability. However, when innovation is pursued without adequate ethical grounding, insufficient governance transparency, or inadequate genuine stakeholder engagement, institutions face serious risk of irreversible loss of stakeholder confidence, significant reputational harm within the broader educational community, and accelerating long-term strategic and financial decline.

Taken in their totality, the findings of this study carry important implications for institutional accreditation, quality assurance, and strategic planning processes. Accreditation bodies and quality assurance agencies are increasingly incorporating evidence of ethical governance, equitable access, and data stewardship into their institutional review criteria. Institutions that have proactively embedded cognitive science-informed management practices alongside robust ethical oversight frameworks are therefore better positioned not only to demonstrate compliance with evolving accreditation standards but also to articulate a distinctive institutional identity grounded in evidence-based, ethically responsible educational leadership. This competitive differentiation is increasingly valuable in a global higher education marketplace characterised by growing institutional diversity, international student mobility, and heightened public scrutiny of institutional governance practices. The strategic imperative for cognitive science-informed ethical leadership in education has never been more compelling or more practically urgent.

The substantial body of evidence assembled, critically evaluated, and synthesised in this paper strongly and consistently supports a model of responsible educational innovation that places cognitive science-informed management practice at the heart of institutional governance, and that insists upon the deliberate, structured, and continuously renewed co-evolution of institutional innovative capacity and principled ethical accountability. Educational managers who authentically commit to this demanding but ultimately rewarding dual agenda are best positioned to lead their institutions with integrity and effectiveness through the complex and rapidly evolving landscape of twenty-first-century higher education. In conclusion, the synergistic convergence of cognitive science, responsible innovation management, and ethical accountability provides a powerful, evidence-grounded, and practically actionable framework for fundamentally improving the quality, fairness, and sustainability of educational management. The purposeful integration of these three previously separate domains enables institutions to develop and implement strategies that are simultaneously evidence-based, genuinely equitable, operationally transparent, and authentically trustworthy to the full range of institutional stakeholders.

6. Future Implications

Future research should rigorously strive to confirm the theoretical model developed and proposed in this paper through carefully designed empirical research conducted in real-life institutional settings within the higher education sector across diverse national and cultural contexts. Survey-based large-scale research designs or in-depth comparative institutional case studies would both provide valuable empirical grounding that is currently absent from the published literature. In particular, the systematic study of the correlations and causal relationships between cognitive innovation adoption practices, ethical leadership behaviours, and measurable institutional performance outcomes represents one of the most significant and practically impactful future research directions identified by this synthesis. Structural equation modelling offers a methodologically rigorous and appropriate quantitative method for empirically testing and validating the complex mediation relationships proposed in the conceptual framework developed by this paper, and researchers are strongly encouraged to pursue this analytical methodology within appropriately designed longitudinal study frameworks.

From a policy and regulatory standpoint, policymakers, accreditation bodies, and government educational authorities urgently need to develop standardised, evidence-based, and enforceable regulatory protocols governing how neuro-data, behavioural data, and AI-generated educational insights can be ethically collected, stored, analysed, and used in educational settings across diverse national, cultural, and institutional contexts. Voluntary institutional codes of conduct, while valuable as initial steps, are demonstrably insufficient as standalone governance mechanisms; formal and independently enforced regulatory standards with transparent oversight mechanisms and meaningful sanctions for non-compliance will be practically necessary as the use of AI, neurotechnology, and advanced behavioural analytics in education continues to accelerate. Educational institutions should meanwhile proactively establish formal internal ethics committees specifically tasked with providing ongoing rigorous oversight of the institution's use of AI-driven learning analytics platforms, cognitive monitoring systems, and educational data management practices, ensuring that all such technologies are consistently deployed in genuine accordance with principles of procedural fairness, fully informed consent, data minimisation, and robust privacy protection.

Leadership development and training programmes represent another critical and immediately actionable arena for practical institutional investment and reform. Carefully designed programmes that explicitly and systematically incorporate evidence-based ethical decision-making models alongside applied cognitive science frameworks and case-based leadership simulation exercises can substantially and measurably enhance leadership capability and ethical awareness at all levels of institutional management, effectively preparing educational leaders to navigate with confidence and integrity the complex, multi-stakeholder ethical terrain that inevitably accompanies ambitious technological innovation and organisational change. Two other important areas requiring dedicated future research attention include comprehensive cross-cultural and cross-national comparative studies examining the differential role of ethical accountability norms and practices in diverse international educational systems, and carefully designed longitudinal studies empirically examining whether systematically implemented cognitive science-informed governance approaches produce measurable and durable improvements in educational performance outcomes and stakeholder trust levels over extended time periods.

By consistently and visibly carrying the educational innovation agenda forward in a manner that genuinely and demonstrably prioritises institutional responsibility, stakeholder transparency, equitable access, and inclusive governance, higher education institutions will be positioned to sustain and progressively strengthen the stakeholder confidence essential to long-term institutional health, community legitimacy, and social impact. The compelling and evidence-grounded synergy between cognitive science insights, principled ethical governance frameworks, and adaptive strategic leadership represents not merely a desirable but an urgent and necessary direction for the future development of educational management research and practice globally. Institutions that authentically and consistently embrace this integrated leadership approach will be better positioned not only to achieve their immediate educational and organisational performance goals but also to make a meaningful, lasting, and socially valued contribution to the broader public mission of higher education in an increasingly complex, interconnected, and technology-mediated twenty-first-century world.

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Bridging Policy and Practice: Gaps in Child Psychological Assessment Systems in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Child mental health evaluation is essential for early detection, intervention, and prevention of psychological difficulties. In Sri Lanka, although child and adolescent mental health is increasingly recognized as a public health priority, the absence of a standardized, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive psychological assessment framework remains a major policy limitation. This study critically examines national and system-level gaps in child psychological assessment through an analysis of policy frameworks, institutional structures, and current practices. Using a qualitative policy analysis approach, the study draws on national policy documents, institutional reports, and recent literature (2021 - 2026). The findings highlight several interconnected challenges, including the lack of a national framework, over-reliance on hospital-based models, weak integration with the education system, shortage of trained professionals, absence of culturally validated tools, fragmented data systems, and limited attention to vulnerable populations. The study proposes a multi-level model integrating school-based assessments, culturally adapted tools, and centralized monitoring mechanisms.

Keywords: Child psychological assessment, policy gaps, school-based mental health, mental health systems, early identification and intervention

1. Introduction

Mental health in children and adolescents has become a worldwide public health concern, and it has been estimated that about 13–20 percent of children and adolescents worldwide have diagnosable mental health disorders (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). Notably, a considerable percentage of these disorders start to affect individuals prior to the age of 14, but they go unnoticed and untreated, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Patel et al., 2022). Structural inequalities, limitations in access to services, and socio-economic vulnerabilities also contribute to the increased burden of mental health issues among children in such contexts. As a lower-middle-income nation experiencing rapid socio-economic transition, Sri Lanka faces numerous global challenges as well as country-specific contextual dynamics.

The combination of post-conflict recovery, prolonged economic difficulties, and continuous changes in the education system defines the Sri Lankan context. These factors have led to the augmentation of psychosocial strain in children and adolescents, affecting their emotional, behavioural, and cognitive development. For example, the economic crisis has heightened household stress, and the competitive nature of the academic environment has contributed to rising performance-related anxiety in students. Empirical evidence shows an increase in the rates of depression, anxiety, and behavioural complications among schoolchildren in Sri Lanka, and the systematic identification of these problems and the mechanisms of their prevention is urgently required (Rajapakshe, 2023; Mudunna, 2026). Although these trends are present, many of the affected children still go undetected because there are no established and accessible systems of psychological assessment.

Psychological assessment is one of the foundations of successful mental health care, as it is the cornerstone in identifying mental health issues at an early age, diagnosing mental disorders, planning interventions, and tracking developmental progress. Psychometrically, assessment allows the identification of mental health issues with the help of reliable and valid tools, whereas ecologically, it allows one to understand the child in the context of the wider social and environmental picture (Achenbach and Rescorla, 2021; Tudge et al., 2022). Modern models focus on multi-informant and multi-method designs, which combine information from teachers, parents, and children themselves. These methods are especially significant in school environments, where the indications of psychological problems tend to appear early.

The world has seen a paradigm shift from clinic-based mental health services to prevention-oriented assessment systems that are community- and school-based. Screening programmes are increasingly viewed as a highly important tool in early identification, since schools are the most suitable location due to their accessibility and constant contact with children (Fazel et al., 2023; Reinke et al., 2022). Through such systems, emotional and behavioural issues are detected early, stigma towards mental health services is reduced, and timely interventions are made. Nevertheless, these systems are yet to be implemented in LMICs because of policy, resource, and infrastructural barriers.

Psychological assessment practices in Sri Lanka are also described as being fragmented, inconsistent, and reactive in nature. Mental health services are mostly centralised in hospital settings, where the assessment process is often carried out only after serious symptoms have developed. This model restricts the chances of early diagnosis and prevention, especially among children in rural and underserved regions (Hettiarachchi, 2021). Moreover, the education system, though considered an important environment in child development, lacks an organised method of integrating psychological assessment into educational practice. School counsellors and teachers tend to rely on their subjective opinions instead of standardised tools, which can lead to under-identification or misidentification of psychological problems.

Whereas Sri Lanka has developed several national policies surrounding child health, education, and wellbeing, these frameworks lack the structure of psychological assessment systems. The current policies are more inclined to focus on overall wellbeing, physical health, and curative care, and focus less on early screening, standardised assessment tools, and integrated service delivery models. This creates a substantial discrepancy between policy intentions and practice, leading to lost chances of early identification and support.

In addition, the absence of culturally tested assessment instruments makes the situation even worse. Most of the psychological tools applied in Sri Lanka have been adopted from Western contexts without proper validation for the local culture and language. This raises questions about their reliability, validity, and suitability in reflecting the lived experiences of Sri Lankan children. Together with the lack of trained professionals and poor data systems, these issues point to the necessity of a thoroughly developed and contextually grounded approach to psychological assessment.

Based on these shortcomings, it is urgent to take a critical look at the current policy framework and identify gaps that prevent the formation of efficient child psychological assessment systems. To fill these gaps, policy change is necessary, alongside providing assessment practices in schools, building culturally responsive tools, and empowering institutions.

Thus, this paper seeks to critically examine the policy gaps in child psychological assessment at the national level in Sri Lanka, with reference to structural, systemic, and implementation-level challenges. In addition, the study offers an elaborate framework for establishing a standardised, school-based psychological assessment system that is aligned with international best practices and sensitive to local realities. In doing so, this study contributes to policy discussion as well as to practical efforts to enhance child mental health outcomes in Sri Lanka and in other LMICs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Child Psychological Assessment

There are several theoretical traditions on which child psychological assessment is based. The psychometric theory is one of the fundamental bases of measurement, emphasising the importance of reliability, validity, standardisation, and objectivity (DeVellis and Thorpe, 2022). In this view, psychological assessment instruments must demonstrate internal consistency, construct validity, and cross-cultural applicability to guarantee accurate diagnosis of mental health conditions. Without such rigour, assessment results may lead to misdiagnosis or under-identification of psychological problems.

To supplement psychometric methods, a more comprehensive perspective on child development is offered by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tudge et al., 2022), which places the child within the context of various interacting systems such as family, school, and community, allowing development to be considered through the prism of socio-cultural context. This perspective reminds us that psychological evaluation should not focus solely on individual-level characteristics but should also include environmental factors such as parenting styles, school climate, and socio-economic status. Ecological approaches are especially applicable in the Sri Lankan context, where cultural norms, family structure, and educational expectations have a significant influence on children's behaviour.

Moreover, constructivist theories, especially those of Piaget and Vygotsky, emphasise the active involvement of children in the process of constructing knowledge and meaning. These theories contribute to the adoption of formative and process-oriented assessment methods, in which it is important to understand the thinking processes, social interactions, and learning experiences of the child. The notion of the Zone of Proximal Development developed by Vygotsky underscores the significance of determining not only existing skills but also future progress with the help of a teacher.

Modern models incorporate these theoretical views into multi-method and multi-informant assessment systems that combine quantitative measures with qualitative observations and reports from teachers, parents, and children (Achenbach and Rescorla, 2021). These combined strategies are regarded as best practice in the evaluation of child psychology, especially in school settings.

2.2 Global Trends in Child Psychological Assessment

In recent years, child psychological assessment has changed considerably, moving beyond clinical, diagnosis-based models towards preventive, school-based, and community-oriented approaches. This shift reflects an increased understanding that early detection of mental health issues is essential to successful intervention and improved long-term outcomes (Fazel et al., 2023).

The adoption of school-based mental health screening systems is one of the most notable global trends. Schools are gaining popularity as a non-stigmatising and convenient setting to identify psychological difficulties, as they are involved with children on a regular basis. Empirical research shows that school-based screening can contribute to a significant increase in the rate of early detection and to the reduction of long-term mental health issues (Reinke et al., 2022).

Another significant development is the adoption of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), which combine assessment and intervention at multiple levels, such as universal screening, targeted intervention for at-risk students, and intensive intervention for severe cases. This model enables adequate allocation of resources and the provision of children with appropriate levels of care relating to their needs (Sugai and Horner, 2021).

Moreover, culturally responsive assessment practices have received more focus. Studies on cross-cultural psychology point out that cultural settings shape psychological constructs and behavioural manifestations, and that assessment instruments should be tailored and validated for different groups of people (Van de Vijver and Leung, 2021). Technological developments have also played a part in the field, with digital and AI-based assessment tools emerging that allow mass screening and real-time data collection. Nevertheless, their implementation in low- and middle-income nations remains limited due to infrastructural and resource constraints.

Despite these global innovations, the literature consistently notes that low- and middle-income countries face substantial challenges in implementing comprehensive psychological assessment systems, including insufficient resources, an untrained workforce, and weak policy frameworks (Patel et al., 2022).

2.3 Child Mental Health and Assessment in Sri Lanka

The child mental health situation in Sri Lanka reflects both global trends and local issues. According to empirical studies, the prevalence of emotional and behavioural issues in children is rising, including anxiety, depression, and conduct disorders (Rajapakshe, 2023). The causes of these problems are diverse and may include academic stress, family problems, poverty, and adverse experiences.

However, psychological assessment services are limited. Mental health services are highly centralised in cities and tertiary care hospitals, which leads to unequal access for different regions (Hettiarachchi, 2021). Moreover, the conduct of systematic assessment is limited by the lack of specialists such as child psychologists and psychiatrists.

Studies also show that assessment practices in Sri Lanka are highly informal and inconsistent, especially in schools. Educators often make judgements based on observation rather than using standardised tools, which leads to subjective and sometimes biased assessments (Mudunna, 2026). The lack of access to validated instruments and training in psychological assessment only exacerbates this problem.

The lack of culturally adapted assessment instruments is another major problem. Most of the instruments available in Sri Lanka are based on the Western context and do not provide sufficient representation of local cultural norms, linguistic peculiarities, and behavioural expressions (De Silva et al., 2022). This questions the validity and reliability of assessment outcomes and underscores the necessity of contextually adequate tools.

2.4 Policy Context and Gaps

Sri Lanka has made significant efforts to formulate policies on child health and wellbeing, such as the National Health Policy (2016–2025), the National Strategic Plan on Child Health (2018–2025), and early childhood development policies. These frameworks focus on enhancing health service accessibility, wellbeing, and institutional coordination (Ministry of Health, 2023).

Nevertheless, when these policies are critically reviewed, several structural constraints emerge in relation to psychological assessment of children. First, there is no clear emphasis on assessment systems, since the policies are based on general wellbeing and treatment-related services rather than organised assessment methods. Second, there are no nationally standardised tools and operational guidelines, leading to inconsistency in practices across institutions. Third, poor cross-sector integration, especially across health, education, and social services, narrows successful implementation and coordination. Lastly, policies do not show enough focus on preventive practice, with more focus placed on treatment rather than early diagnosis. All these gaps reflect the necessity of more detailed and coordinated policy that addresses psychological assessment as an essential part of child mental health systems.

2.5 Conceptual Gap in Existing Literature

Although the literature on child mental health in Sri Lanka has yielded important information on the topic, there is a notable gap concerning the specific subject of psychological assessment systems and policy frameworks. The majority of research is inclined to prioritise prevalence and the clinical nature of mental health disorders, analysis of service delivery issues, and the emphasis on mental health outcomes. Nonetheless, little focus has been directed at the development of standardised assessment systems, the integration of assessment into education systems, or policy-level analysis of assessment practices.

This is especially significant since psychological assessment lies at the centre of intervention strategy development, resource distribution, and policy-making. In the absence of valid and systematic evaluation systems, it is difficult to determine needs, track progress, and judge the effectiveness of programmes. Such a gap therefore needs to be addressed in order to reinforce research and practice on child mental health.

2.6 Research Gap

The literature suggests that psychological assessment is a vital element of an efficient child mental health system, and that global trends favour school-based, preventive, and culturally responsive strategies. Nonetheless, Sri Lanka still struggles with issues such as a lack of resources, the absence of standardised tools, and ineffective policy frameworks. Although awareness of these concerns has been increasing, no intensive study has been conducted to explore policy gaps in the child psychological assessment system in the Sri Lankan context.

Hence, this paper fills this gap by leveraging a systematic policy analysis, examining structural and implementation-level challenges, and proposing a standardised, school-based assessment framework. In this way, it contributes to academic knowledge as well as to policy development initiatives to enhance child psychological assessment systems.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The proposed study uses a qualitative policy analysis design to critically analyse gaps in national policy on child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka. Qualitative policy analysis is particularly suitable for exploring complex systems where a number of actors, institutions, and contextual dynamics interact to affect policy formulation and execution (Gilson et al., 2022). This design is capable of exploring the content of policy, its assumptions, and implementation dynamics in depth, unlike purely quantitative methods.

This research is informed by the interpretive and critical analytical schools of thought, which aim not merely to describe current policies but also to analyse how effective, coherent, and responsive they are to prevailing demands in child psychological assessment. This is aligned with modern health and education policy research, which focuses on both the form and substance of policy (Walt and Gilson, 1994; updated applications in Gilson et al., 2022). Moreover, the research is guided by a multi-level analytical framework according to which policy gaps at the policy, system, and practice levels are analysed, enabling a complete picture of how various aspects of the system manifest policy gaps.

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

In this research, the authors have made use of various secondary information sources, such as national policy documents, peer-reviewed literature, and international reports. The policy documents were chosen based on their relevance to child health, education, and mental health care in Sri Lanka. These include such major national frameworks as the National Health Policy (2016–2025), the National Strategic Plan on Child Health (2018–2025), the National Mental Health Policy, early childhood development policies, and corresponding Ministry of Education circulars and guidelines.

Besides policy documents, recent peer-reviewed literature published between 2021 and 2026 was also considered to ensure that the analysis is grounded in recent trends and evidence. The sources were accessed through large academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The inclusion criteria centred on studies involving child mental health, psychological assessment, and policy, with particular attention to studies related to Sri Lanka or other low- and middle-income countries.

In order to offer a global outlook and comparative standards, reports from international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank were also included in the study. These materials provided useful information about international best practices and policy frameworks.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The form of data collection was a systematic review of documents. The keywords used to find relevant documents and scholarly articles included, but were not limited to, “child psychological assessment Sri Lanka”, “child mental health policy LMIC”, “school-based mental health assessment”, and “policy gaps in mental health systems”. The relevant, credible, and recent documents were then filtered down from the identified set. Preference was placed on peer-reviewed publications and official policy documents to ensure that the data sources were reliable and valid.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study uses thematic analysis to identify and interpret policy gaps in child psychological assessment. The analysis was carried out in a structured manner using a modified version of Braun and Clarke (2021), as well as policy analysis paradigms. First, the entire set of selected documents was perused carefully to develop familiarity with their content, goals, and scope. Then, relevant data segments were systematically coded and organised in terms of recurring themes connected to assessment systems, policy provisions, and implementation challenges.

The initial codes were then classified into broader thematic categories reflecting various forms of policy gaps. The themes were grouped into three analytic levels: policy level, system level, and practice level. Lastly, the identified themes were interpreted according to theoretical frameworks and international best practices, with particular focus on inconsistencies between policy and practice, structural barriers, and contextual factors. This process facilitated an in-depth and systemic insight into the issues of child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka.

3.4.1 Policy–System–Practice Model

In order to increase analytical rigour, this paper uses the Policy–System–Practice (PSP) framework, which conceptualises the existence of gaps at three interconnected levels. The policy level defines the direction and priorities of psychological assessment systems. Institutional capacity, human resources, and infrastructure are factors at the system level that determine the manner in which such policies are operationalised. At the practice level, policy is implemented in schools, health care, and community settings.

This framework allows the issue to be analysed from a holistic perspective, showing how policy-level constraints are converted into system-level vulnerabilities and practice-level obstacles, thus providing a full picture of how psychological assessment systems work.

3.4.2 Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigour

A number of strategies were used to enhance the quality and credibility of the study. Credibility was achieved by incorporating various data sources, such as policy documents, empirical studies, and international reports, and by cross-validating findings across sources. Reliability was ensured by transparently documenting the data collection and analysis processes and by applying predefined analytical frameworks.

Confirmability was ensured by basing interpretations on factual evidence rather than subjective assumptions, whereas transferability was facilitated by drawing on global literature that allows comparison with other low- and middle-income contexts. Together, these measures make the findings robust, reliable, and analytically sound.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This paper relies entirely on secondary data, drawing on published literature and policy documents that are publicly accessible. Consequently, no human subjects were involved, and there was no need for ethical consent. Nevertheless, ethical principles of research were carefully observed throughout the study through proper representation of data, avoidance of misinterpretation, and academic integrity in the use and citation of sources.

3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

Despite its advantages, there are some limitations associated with this methodological approach. The use of secondary data limits access to real-time information on policy implementation and may not represent the complexity of practices on the ground. In addition, policy documents may contain an idealised depiction of systems rather than reality. The lack of primary data, such as interviews with policymakers and practitioners, also restricts contextual insight.

Nevertheless, these limitations are addressed by the inclusion of recent empirical research and various sources of data, which together provide a more extensive and holistic view of the research problem.

3.7 Justification of Methodological Approach

The selected methodological approach is suitable for this study, as it makes it possible to examine policy structures in depth and to capture multi-level system dynamics. It is congruent with international best practice in policy research, especially research aimed at identifying structural gaps and proposing system-level changes. Since the systems of child psychological assessment are complex, this approach offers a sound framework for analysing both policy intent and the challenges of its implementation.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of Findings

The critical review of national policy documents, institutional frameworks, and current empirical sources demonstrates that child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka is systemically fragmented, non-standardised, and only weakly integrated across sectors. Such challenges are not confined to single layers within the system but appear at various layers, including policy, institutional capability, and operational practice.

On the whole, the results suggest that psychological assessment practices remain largely reactive, institutionally discontinuous, and non-uniform, rather than being integrated within a more comprehensive, proactive, and coordinated model. To ensure clarity in the analysis, the findings are categorised into four interconnected domains: policy-level gaps, system-level gaps, practice-level gaps, and cultural and contextual gaps. All these areas contribute to the ineffectiveness and inequity of child psychological assessment systems in Sri Lanka.

4.2 Policy-Level Gaps

4.2.1 Absence of a Standardised National Assessment Framework

One of the key findings of this research is that there is no nationally accepted framework for child psychological evaluation. Although different policies recognise the relevance of child wellbeing, they fail to offer concrete direction on how psychological assessment is supposed to take place in an orderly manner. Specifically, there are no nationally approved assessment tools, standardised screening processes, or well-structured assessment procedures.

Consequently, institutions such as schools, hospitals, and child protection agencies adopt different and uncoordinated approaches, resulting in gaps in identification and intervention procedures. The absence of standardisation weakens the comparability of assessment results and restricts the possibility of tracking child mental health trends at the national level.

4.2.2 Limited Emphasis on Preventive and Early Assessment

Another important policy gap is that current frameworks do not focus on preventive and early psychological assessment. Current policies are mostly focused on treatment and rehabilitation, with little attention paid to mechanisms of early detection. Very little exists to suggest that there are any organised policy guidelines or mandates on routine psychological screening procedures, in schools, early identification programmes, or ongoing monitoring of child development processes.

Such a reactive orientation postpones intervention until psychological issues are more complicated, which makes support mechanisms less efficient and increases long-term risks to children. The lack of preventive strategies indicates a serious gap in ensuring that policy frameworks are in line with current practices in child mental health.

4.2.3 Weak Cross-Sector Policy Integration

The findings also highlight the absence of coordinated policy integration across key sectors, namely health, education, and child protection services. Policies typically operate within sectoral boundaries, with little coordination or exchange of information.

For instance, education policies lack specific procedures for the practice of psychological assessment in the classroom, and health policies do not effectively utilise schools as access points for assessment. Similarly, child protection services display low levels of coordination with the two sectors. This fragmentation results in inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and gaps in service delivery, which are particularly pronounced for children who require multi-sectoral services.

4.3 System-Level Gaps

4.3.1 Over-Reliance on Hospital-Based Assessment Models

At the system level, psychological assessment services are highly concentrated in hospital and clinical settings, reflecting a centralised and specialist-driven system. Although these services are important, their accessibility is limited and this restricts the coverage of assessment systems, especially among children living in rural and underserved regions.

This centralised design contributes to delays in receiving assessment services, geographical barriers, and an overwhelming burden on specialised mental health facilities. This limitation is further compounded by the absence of community- and school-based assessment systems that could create more opportunities for early diagnosis and intervention.

4.3.2 Shortage of Trained Mental Health Professionals

The current paper reveals a prominent shortage of professionals trained in psychological assessment, including child psychologists, psychiatrists, and school counsellors. This workforce constraint limits the ability to introduce large-scale assessment programmes and restricts services, particularly beyond urban centres.

In addition, the shortage of specialised training in psychological assessment compounds this problem, leaving a discrepancy between policy expectations and the capacity to deliver. This lack of staff competence is a major challenge to the formation of an efficient and sustainable assessment system.

4.3.3 Fragmented and Underdeveloped Data Systems

Another significant system-level gap is the lack of integrated data and monitoring systems for child psychological assessment. At present, no national database is in place to systematically organise assessment outcomes, monitor the prevalence of psychological problems, or determine the effectiveness of treatment.

Current data collection practices are disjointed and discontinuous, with activities usually limited to individual institutions without any national coordination. This absence of credible and integrated information restricts the capacity of policymakers to make evidence-based decisions and to design more targeted and responsive interventions.

4.4 Practice-Level Gaps

4.4.1 Informal and Subjective Assessment Practices

Psychological assessment is often carried out informally and subjectively at the practice level, especially in schools. School staff and teachers tend to make judgements based on their observations rather than on standardised testing instruments. Although these observations may offer some valuable information, the lack of systematic assessment procedures makes identification practices variable across schools, decision-making prone to bias, and consistency lacking.

These constraints raise doubts about the accuracy and authenticity of assessment results, which ultimately affects the accuracy of identification and the success of subsequent interventions.

4.4.2 Lack of Standardised and Validated Tools in Schools

According to the findings, schools do not appear to have access to validated and standardised psychological assessment instruments. Even where tools are available, they are not always utilised or incorporated into routine practices.

In most cases, the available tools have not been adapted to the local environment, are not available in both Sinhala and Tamil, and have not been tested with Sri Lankan populations. These limitations reduce their efficacy and may result in inappropriate or incomplete evaluation, further compromising the credibility of assessment practices.

4.4.3 Limited Training and Professional Competence

The lack of training of teachers and school counsellors is a major challenge to ensuring successful psychological assessment. Most teachers are unfamiliar with the principles of assessment, the administration and interpretation of assessment tools, and clear knowledge of referral procedures.

This professional incompetence contributes to the under-identification of psychological problems and to poor linkages between assessment and intervention. Professional capacity should therefore be enhanced to improve the effectiveness of assessment practices.

4.4.4 Weak Referral and Support Mechanisms

Although psychological problems are sometimes identified, referral pathways have been found to be unclear and ineffective. The lack of coordination between schools and mental health services results in delays in obtaining professional support, loss of continuity, and poor follow-up systems.

These issues underscore the necessity of a more integrated and systematic referral system that supports timely intervention and continuity of care.

4.5 Cultural and Contextual Gaps

4.5.1 Lack of Culturally Validated Assessment Tools

The research shows that there is a heavy dependence on psychological assessment tools developed in the West, which may not be reliable measures within the socio-cultural setting of Sri Lanka. Without adequate cultural adaptation and validation, these tools may fail to capture culturally specific manifestations of behaviour and emotion.

This raises significant issues of cultural validity, interpretive accuracy, and the relevance of assessment outcomes. The development of culturally responsive instruments is therefore important for enhancing the validity and contextual relevance of psychological evaluation.

4.5.2 Language and Contextual Barriers

Sri Lanka has a bilingual situation, which presents another challenge for psychological assessment. A great number of tools have not been successfully translated into Sinhala and Tamil, leading to misunderstanding of assessment items, discrepancies in responses, and a decrease in the reliability of findings. Moreover, family dynamics, discipline, and social expectations are cultural aspects that shape the expression and interpretation of psychological problems. These contextual aspects demonstrate the necessity of assessment methods that are sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity.

4.6 Summary of Findings

To summarise, the results indicate that child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka is constrained by interrelated gaps at several levels. Policy-level constraints relate to uncoordinated structures, low focus on prevention, and inadequate sectoral integration. System-level challenges include centralised models of service, workforce shortages, and fragmented data systems. Informal assessment techniques, the absence of validated instruments, and inadequate professional training undermine assessment at the practice level. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic factors influence the validity and suitability of assessment practices.

Taken together, these results point to the fact that the challenge is not isolated but systemic in nature, and that multi-level and multi-faceted reforms are necessary to build an efficient, equitable, and contextually appropriate psychological assessment system.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

This research found multi-level policy gaps in child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka, occurring at the policy, system, and practice levels. The results indicate that although Sri Lanka has developed a number of policies addressing child health and wellbeing, these frameworks fail to facilitate the formulation of a preventive, standardised, and comprehensive system of psychological assessment. Rather, existing practice remains highly disjointed, reactive, and reliant on clinical settings. The results can be compared with broader evidence from low- and middle-income countries, where mental health systems tend to be underdeveloped and poorly integrated across sectors (Patel et al., 2022). However, the Sri Lankan context presents particular challenges such as post-conflict recovery, economic instability, and difficulties within the education system, which further increase the necessity of implementing systematic and accessible assessment mechanisms.

5.2 Policy-Level Gaps: Absence of a Coherent Assessment Framework

The most significant gap detected at the policy level is the lack of a nationally standardised framework for child psychological assessment. Although current policies focus on overall wellbeing and service delivery, they do not offer clear and operational guidelines on systematic screening, the application of validated assessment tools, and the integration of assessment practices across sectors. This lack of specificity leads to inconsistencies in implementation and weak accountability mechanisms. In policy analysis terms, this represents a design gap in which policy objectives lack well-defined operational strategies (Gilson et al., 2022).

Moreover, the results have shown that national policy priorities are not fully aligned with new international directions. Although modern mental health models focus on early detection and preventive strategies, Sri Lankan policies remain treatment-based. This suggests that recent developments in child mental health and psychological assessment have not been fully integrated into policy development, which limits the efficiency of current systems (Fazel et al., 2023).

5.3 System-Level Gaps: Structural and Resource Constraints

At the system level, the paper identifies major constraints in institutional capacity, human resources, and infrastructure. The centralised, specialist-led model is not particularly responsive to the needs of mass child mental health, as evidenced by over-reliance on hospital-based services. This model is restrictive, especially for children in rural and underserved communities, slows down the recognition of psychological issues, and imposes an extra burden on specialised services. These results align with global evidence showing that mental health systems in low- and middle-income countries are often constrained by the lack of resources and insufficient personnel (Patel et al., 2022).

Moreover, the shortage of trained specialists such as child psychologists and counsellors substantially limits the scope of assessment practice. This represents a critical capacity gap, in which policy intentions cannot be efficiently translated into practice owing to inadequate human resources. Another concern is the lack of integrated data systems, which restricts the ability to track trends, measure interventions, and inform policy decisions. In the absence of quality and coordinated data, formulating evidence-based strategies or allocating resources effectively becomes problematic.

5.4 Practice-Level Gaps: Fragmentation and Subjectivity

At the practice level, psychological assessment in Sri Lanka is fragmented and subjective. In most school settings, educators rely more on observational judgement than on standardised assessment instruments, leading to inconsistency in identification and referral processes. From a psychometric point of view, this raises concerns about both the reliability and validity of assessment practices. The lack of uniform tools undermines the validity of assessment outcomes and can result in under-identification or over-identification of psychological problems.

Furthermore, these issues are compounded by the absence of formal training in psychological assessment. School counsellors and teachers may not have the relevant knowledge and skills required to identify, evaluate, and interpret psychological problems, which represents a major gap in professional competence. This limitation reduces the success of early detection efforts and weakens the link between assessment and intervention.

5.5 Cultural and Contextual Challenges in Assessment

The availability of culturally validated assessment tools is one of the major findings of this study. The instruments currently used in Sri Lanka are based on Western contexts and may not align with local cultural norms, values, and expressions of behaviour. This problem can be interpreted in terms of cross-cultural psychology, which emphasises that psychological constructs are rooted in cultural contexts (Van de Vijver and Leung, 2021). Without proper cultural adaptation and validation, assessment tools may produce biased or misleading results.

Within the Sri Lankan setting, child behaviour and its interpretation are heavily influenced by linguistic diversity, particularly the use of Sinhala and Tamil, as well as family structures and social norms. Consequently, the development of culturally responsive and contextually appropriate assessment tools is essential to ensure accurate and meaningful evaluation.

5.6 Policy–Practice Disconnect: Implementation Challenges

Another important finding of the study is the disconnect between policy and practice, whereby existing policies are not effectively translated into implementation. The causes of this gap can be linked to a number of interconnected factors, including the existence of incoherent implementation guidelines, the absence of effective coordination across sectors, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems. In governance terms, this reflects broader problems in policy execution and institutional alignment. Policies can be well-intended, but without proper execution and accountability, their impact is limited.

5.7 Implications for School-Based Assessment Systems

One of the most relevant implications of this study is the necessity to incorporate psychological assessment into the education system, especially through school-based models. Schools offer a unique and practical setting for early identification, since they interact with children on a regular basis. The proposed three-tier model is in line with international best practices, as it includes universal screening, targeted assessment of at-risk groups, and specialised clinical intervention for severe cases. The model promotes an inclusive and preventive approach, reduces dependence on hospital-based services, and encourages timely intervention.

Moreover, the combination of psychological assessment with School-Based Assessment (SBA) systems can also increase the validity of teacher judgement and help to assess student development in a more holistic way. This is particularly relevant in the Sri Lankan context, where SBA already forms an integral part of the education system.

5.8 Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the literature by incorporating various theoretical perspectives into a single analytical framework. Psychometric theory emphasises the use of standardised and reliable assessment instruments, while ecological systems theory highlights the effects of environmental and contextual conditions on child development. In addition, policy analysis frameworks provide insights into structural and implementation-level gaps. The synthesis of these approaches enables the study to offer an in-depth understanding of psychological assessment systems that extends beyond traditional clinical practice.

5.9 Practical and Policy Implications

The results have significant implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Policymakers need to develop national guidelines on psychological assessment and emphasise early identification and prevention mechanisms. For the education sector, integrating assessment into school systems and strengthening the training of teachers and counsellors are crucial measures. Researchers should develop culturally relevant assessment measures and conduct longitudinal research to gain a clearer insight into child mental health development.

5.10 Contribution to LMIC Contexts

Although this study is focused on Sri Lanka, the findings have broader implications for other low- and middle-income nations facing similar problems. The identified gaps and the proposed school-based model are important contributions to policy development and system strengthening in similar contexts, as part of the global effort to enhance child mental health systems.

5.11 Summary of Discussion

In conclusion, the current state of child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka is constrained by policy, system, and practice challenges that are interconnected with one another. Policy-level design, system-level capacity, and inconsistencies in practice are all barriers to building a successful assessment system. This necessitates a multi-level and integrated strategy of policy reform, system strengthening, and practice enhancement to address these challenges.

5.12 Contribution to Knowledge

This research makes three major contributions to the discipline. First, it provides a theoretical contribution by combining psychometric, ecological, and policy analysis perspectives into a single framework for understanding psychological assessment systems. Second, it makes a methodological contribution through the use of a multi-level policy analysis approach grounded in qualitative analysis. Third, it contributes at the policy level by proposing a viable and contextually applicable school-based assessment model for Sri Lanka and other low- and middle-income nations.

6. Implications

6.1 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have considerable implications for national-level policy formulation and reform in Sri Lanka. Most importantly, there is a pressing necessity to develop a unified and comprehensive national system of child psychological assessment. Such a system should explicitly define how standardised assessment tools and procedures are used, offer clear guidelines on screening, identification, and referral processes, and articulate the roles and responsibilities of the various sectors involved. Such a framework would foster uniformity, fairness, and accountability in assessment practices across schools, health-care facilities, and child protection services. Further, it would enable systematic tracking of mental health trends among children and aid evidence-based policymaking.

In addition, policymakers should shift from the dominant reactive and treatment-based approach to a preventive and early intervention model. This requires incorporating psychological assessment into routine child health and education systems, especially through systematic and frequent screening programmes. Timely detection of psychological challenges not only enhances individual development but also reduces the long-term social and economic impact of untreated mental illnesses. As such, a preventive strategy should be adopted in developing a more effective and sustainable mental health system.

A further implication is the importance of enhancing cross-sector integration. Successful psychological assessment systems require cooperation among key sectors, such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and child protection and social services. Currently, the lack of coordination leads to disjointed service provision and gaps in service delivery. Formalising cooperative structures, including inter-ministerial task forces, integrated referral systems, shared data platforms, and joint planning programmes, can help ensure that children receive holistic and comprehensive care.

In addition, policy reform should focus on capacity building and ensuring proper allocation of resources to facilitate the adoption of assessment systems. This includes investment in training and professional development of mental health personnel, the expansion of school counselling services, and improved infrastructure to assess, manage, and coordinate services. Even a good policy framework is unlikely to be implemented effectively in the absence of adequate human, financial, and institutional resources.

6.2 Practice Implications

The findings at the practice level suggest that a paradigm shift is necessary in the way psychological assessment is conducted in school and community settings. The significance of psychological assessment in the normal school life of a child is grounded in the rationale and feasibility of implementing early identification and intervention methods because of the central role schools play in children's daily lives. Schools provide a stable and consistent setting in which behavioural and emotional changes can be followed over an extended period, making them a crucial point of entry for systematic assessment.

One implication is the necessity of enhancing teacher capacity with regard to psychological assessment. Teachers are often the first to observe behavioural, emotional, and learning patterns of students, but most of them have not been trained on how to recognise and address psychological issues. Professional development programmes must therefore focus on developing basic competencies in identifying early warning signs, using standardised screening tools, interpreting assessment outcomes, and applying appropriate referral procedures. Strengthening teacher capacity in such areas could greatly support early detection and minimise reliance on subjective and unreliable evaluations.

In addition, it is necessary to implement systems of structured school-based psychological screening. Screening, carried out at key developmental milestones or annually, can aid in the early identification of at-risk students before issues escalate. To make these systems effective, they would need to be underpinned by established tools, operational guidelines, and ethical safeguards that ensure consistency and reliability.

Schools must also have clear referral and support systems in place so that identified students can receive interventions in a timely and appropriate manner. This means creating effective pathways for referring students to skilled mental health professionals, enhancing cooperation between schools and health-care organisations, and introducing follow-up mechanisms that monitor students' progress. Such formal systems are necessary in order to ensure continuity of care and enhanced effectiveness of interventions.

Lastly, multi-stakeholder engagement should also be encouraged in order to support effective practices of psychological assessment. Cooperation between teachers, parents, school counsellors, and health-care professionals will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of children's needs and facilitate organised intervention activities. This methodology aligns with ecological views of child development, which highlight the impact of various environmental systems on children's wellbeing.

6.3 Research Implications

This paper also outlines several key avenues of research that are important for the future development of child psychological assessment systems in Sri Lanka. The development and validation of culturally responsive psychological assessment tools is one of the key priorities. Owing to the weaknesses of existing Western-based measures, it is necessary to develop instruments that reflect local cultural norms and values, linguistic diversity in Sinhala and Tamil, and properly capture context-specific behavioural manifestations. These instruments will need to be subjected to thorough psychometric analyses to determine their reliability, validity, and contextual suitability.

Another important research implication is that longitudinal studies should be carried out to investigate the effects of child mental health over time. Such studies are able to provide valuable insight into developmental pathways, the efficacy of early interventions, and the long-term effectiveness of assessment systems. Such evidence is vital in guiding policy and practice, as it helps stakeholders identify trends of change and assess the sustainability of interventions.

Moreover, the adoption of school-based assessment models needs to be examined in the future through pilot studies and intervention trials. Such research may help to pinpoint successful practices, implementation challenges, and contextual factors of success. These dynamics are critical to understand in order to scale up assessment systems and ensure their sustainability over time.

In addition, mixed-methods research that combines quantitative data with qualitative information obtained from key stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and policymakers, is also necessary. These methods can provide a deeper picture of assessment practices through the use of both empirical research and contextual experiences.

Lastly, comparative research across low- and middle-income countries can add to international knowledge of child psychological assessment systems. The similarities and differences in contexts allow researchers to identify best practices and develop frameworks that are both general and context-specific, and that can be adapted to fit different settings.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Conclusion Related to Objective 1: Policy Analysis

This paper has shown that the current policy frameworks in Sri Lanka, despite acknowledging the importance of child wellbeing and mental health, lack an adequate basis for effective psychological assessment systems. The absence of a national framework, weak focus on prevention strategies, and ineffective cross-sector integration represent critical policy gaps. Such constraints make it difficult to develop coherent and consistent assessment practices and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of mental health services for children.

7.2 Conclusion Related to Objective 2: System and Practice Gaps

The analysis also shows that the implementation of psychological assessment systems is heavily limited by structural, institutional, and practice-level challenges. Factors such as over-reliance on hospital-based services, a shortage of trained professionals, and inadequate integration of data systems restrict accessibility and effectiveness. Informal and subjective modes of assessment at the practice level, coupled with low levels of training and poor referral systems, decrease the reliability and effectiveness of identification processes. These results point to the necessity of implementing system-wide reforms that address both capacity and implementation.

7.3 Conclusion Related to Objective 3: Early Identification and Intervention

The study emphasises the critical role of improving early identification and intervention by developing psychological assessment systems within schools. By incorporating assessment into learning environments and adopting multi-level systems, early identification can be enhanced and timely assistance can be delivered to children with psychological challenges. These methods not only improve individual outcomes but also lead to broader educational and social benefits.

7.4 Final Concluding Statement

To sum up, this paper offers a critical examination of gaps in policy-, system-, and practice-level aspects of child psychological assessment in Sri Lanka. To address these challenges, a multi-level and coordinated response is required, involving policy frameworks that are aligned with capacity for implementation at the system and practice levels. By creating standardised, culturally responsive, and school-based assessment systems, Sri Lanka can take significant steps in enhancing early identification and intervention, leading ultimately to improved mental health and wellbeing of children.

8. Limitations of the Study

Although this research has notable strengths, several limitations must be considered when interpreting the results. These constraints are mainly associated with data sources, methodology, and the scope of the research.

First, this paper is based solely on secondary sources of information, such as national policy documents, institutional reports, and published literature. Although these sources are of great value for understanding policy frameworks and system-level structures, they may not be able to reflect the complexity of real-world implementation. Policy documents tend to provide idealised representations of systems and may not capture the real-world problems, informal procedures, or contextual differences that can exist on the ground. Consequently, a gap can exist between the policies discussed in this research and the practices of practitioners and stakeholders.

Second, the research does not include primary information from major stakeholders, such as teachers, school counsellors, policymakers, and mental health professionals. The lack of stakeholder perspectives restricts the possibility of understanding interpretation, implementation, and experience of policy practices. For example, teachers' capacity insights, institutional constraints, and implementation barriers would have helped to view the identified gaps in a more detailed way. The empirical aspect of the findings can be enhanced by the inclusion of qualitative interviews or surveys in future research.

Third, a qualitative policy analysis approach is used in the analysis, which is appropriate for identifying structural and systemic gaps but does not allow the prevalence and extent of these problems to be measured quantitatively. The results thus focus on trends and themes rather than statistical generalizations. Future research can complement this methodology with quantitative studies, including large-scale surveys or analyses of assessment data, to develop a more extensive view of child psychological assessment systems.

Fourth, policy documents are not always updated or relevant to the latest events, especially in the context of a rapidly changing environment, such as the present-day Sri Lankan economic and social arena. This may affect the accuracy of conclusions about the effectiveness and implementation of policies. Regular changes in policies and the use of real-time information would increase the topicality of analysis.

Fifth, the results of this research are limited to Sri Lanka, which has unique socio-cultural, economic, and institutional conditions. Although some of the insights can be extrapolated to other low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), care should be taken when applying the findings to other settings with different policy environments and resources.

Lastly, the paper is more of a policy and system-level analysis, in that it does not explore individual-level psychological outcomes. Consequently, it does not directly determine the effectiveness of current assessment practices in terms of child mental health outcomes. Future studies should consider the connection between policy analysis and outcome-based research to gain a clearer insight into the efficiency of assessment systems.

8.1 Future Research Directions

Based on these limitations, the following suggestions are proposed for future research. First, research involving primary data collection through interviews, focus groups, and surveys would offer more information regarding stakeholder experiences and implementation difficulties. Second, longitudinal research should be conducted in order to investigate the effects of psychological assessment systems on child development and mental health outcomes over the long term. Third, cross-country and cross-regional research would help to identify best practices and contextual factors that determine successful implementation.

Further studies should also be conducted on the development and validation of culturally relevant psychological assessment instruments, to ensure that they are reliable, valid, and relevant to context. Lastly, mixed-method techniques combining policy analysis with empirical research would be a more effective way of understanding the complexity of child psychological assessment systems.

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Influence of Work Commitment on the Job Performance of Secondary School Teachers in Southwestern, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study examined the levels of job performance and work commitment among secondary school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria and investigated the influence of work commitment on teachers' job performance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 15 principals, 75 Heads of Departments (HODs), and 300 class teachers drawn from 15 randomly selected public secondary schools across five Local Government Areas in Ondo, Osun, and Lagos States. Findings revealed that 15.7%, 67.9%, and 16.4% of the teachers demonstrated low, moderate, and high levels of job performance respectively. Similarly, 11.7%, 72.1%, and 17.1% of the teachers exhibited low, moderate, and high levels of work commitment respectively. The results further showed that work commitment significantly influenced teachers' job performance, $\chi^2(n = 280, df = 4) = 49.942$, $p < .001$. The study concluded that teachers' work commitment is an important determinant of job performance in secondary schools in Southwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: Job performance, work commitment secondary school teachers, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Education is a purposeful activity directed at transmitting knowledge or fostering skills and character traits. It is the transmission of worthy behaviour from one generation to the other. Secondary education is the level of education that comes after primary education. It mediates primary and tertiary education, that is, it comes immediately after primary education and before tertiary education. The secondary education last for about six years. Secondary education is a bridge between primary and tertiary institution and thus holds the compass for the direction any nation intends to follow (Nanbak, 2020).

Teachers have a critical role in educational institutions as strategic leaders and accountable for the quality of education provided on duty. Teachers constantly strive to improve their abilities to give services to students, the community and the environment, most notably their work environment, while carrying out instructional activities(Meiliyani et al., 2021). In the learning process in schools, teachers occupy a significant position and determine the success of education (Nanbak, 2020).

Job performance is defined as an individual personal ability to successfully accomplish task allocated to him or her. Job performance is the behavioural outcome of an employee which points out that the employee is showing positive attitude towards his or her organizations. Teachers' job performance is the sum total of the teachers' execution of their tasks which influences students' academic achievement. Teachers' performance predicts school effectiveness, which helps to establish an effective educational system (Okendo & Mwasenga, 2018). Every educational institution's success depends on its teachers' performance, their commitment to their job is a vital criterion used to access their performance. Teachers' commitment affects the school effectiveness; this could cause teachers to be less successful in their job performance.

The overall success of an educational institution depends on teacher commitment which is directly related to the level of motivation they have in schools. Thus, teachers are the main resource for schools' activities. Importance to all every teacher is professionally responsible to undertaking the profession responsibilities, rule and regulation in order to increase their level of commitment (Nyamubi, 2021). The teaching profession requires commitment, in that affective educator needs to be committed to both their students and the teaching profession as a whole. This means abiding by the rules and regulations and embracing the principles of the teaching profession, as well as the requirements. However, the low commitment affects effectiveness of the school. This, in turn, could lead teachers to be less successful in their professional performance. Performance of the teacher is very important for their success in their daily professional lives (Nwosu, 2012).

1.1. Concept of Work Commitment

Commitment is defined as the amount of passion and dedication teachers have towards their work. Teachers' commitment is considered essential because it is the emotional bond a teacher demonstrates towards their work. Teachers' commitment has been recognised as one of the critical factors for effective teaching. Altun stated that committed teacher devote time for their students, school and teaching profession (Altun, 2017). They are responsible for the development of their students and strive to keep the students up and doing. Commitment on the part of teacher reduces withdrawal behaviours like tardiness, absenteeism and turnover.

Also, when a teacher feels that he or she does not possess the necessary skills to compete for a job in any other field, then the teacher tends to develop continuance commitment and becomes more committed to the school system because of the limited opportunities and alternatives out there (continuance commitment). Similarly, normative commitment could be achieved when a teacher feels that the school system has invested a lot of time and money in training and developing him. He might therefore develop a moral obligation to continue to provide his services to the school.

For instance, when teachers are sponsored to acquire higher degrees outside the country, to improve their skills and performances, they might feel obligated to the school system by increasing their level of involvement in school activities. Whilst affective commitment is when a teacher's values are consistent with the school's values, the teacher would be able to identify and be involved with the school activities and assimilate the values and goals of the school.

According to Neuber *et al*.(2022) , affective commitment has been linked to a wide range of positive outcomes in relation to absenteeism, turnover, organizational behavior and job performance in the organizations. A signal of affective commitment in the school system is usually observed through reduced absenteeism and reduced turnover.

1.2 Goal-Setting Theory

Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory has had a substantial impact in the field of work motivation (Locke & Latham, 1990). Integrating earlier work by Locke (Locke, 1968) with aspects of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986), Locke and Latham outlined a general goal-setting theory of motivation. They suggested that people's goal representations are the efficient causes of behaviour and that people's performance will be maximized when (a) they set specific, difficult goals that have high valence and (b) they understand what behaviours will lead to the goals and feel competent to do those behaviours. This theory, which has received substantial empirical support, is an example of the theories that do not differentiate kinds of motivation. Thus, characteristics of goals (for instance, their difficulty) are used to predict work outcomes, but no attention is given to the fact that different goal contents and different types of regulation of goal pursuits lead to different qualities of performance (Sheldon et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Locke and Latham did not differentiate the concept of performance in order to examine differences between the types of goals and regulations that predict algorithmic versus heuristic performance. In contrast, SDT proposed that autonomous motivation and intrinsic goals are better predictors of effective performance on heuristic tasks (Sheldon et al., 2004), whereas the two types of motivation do not differ in predicting effective algorithmic performance, particularly over the long term (McGraw, 1978). Thus, SDT maintains that differentiating motivation and goals provides an integrated means of relating characteristics of tasks and interpersonal environments, as well as individual differences, to types of performance and well-being. Deci *et al.* (1994) found that a 'meaningful rationale' is one of the important factors that facilitates integrated internalization, while Latham et al. (1988) observed that it facilitates goal acceptance.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The commitment of teachers towards their job is very paramount and important. They are expected to be diligent, dedicated and committed to their job. Teacher's job commitment deals with their attitude towards work and this has an influence on the goals achieved in schools. Teachers' commitment to duty is recognized as a crucial factor for enhancing students' academic performance and overall service delivery. It appears that the work behaviour of some serving teachers in schools seem inadequate and unsatisfactory for improving quality education in that level of education.

It is a fact that low job performance leads to poor academic success. There has been poor academic success recorded in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination in recent years. There is concern among parents that their children academic performance is not satisfactory, as some students failed to pass the (2022/2023) WAEC examinations with the required 5 credit pass, including English and Mathematics (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

This poor performance cannot be ultimately divorced from lack of attention to the level of engagement (commitment) to work exhibited by the teachers, which are assumed to be interwoven and can aid each other for maximum productivity if well used by teachers for the attainment of positive outcomes in secondary schools and as such meet the yearnings and aspiration of the society at large.

The objectives of the study were to: determine the level of job performance of secondary school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria and assess the work commitment level of the teachers.

The following hypothesis was tested: There is no significant influence of work commitment on job performance of the teachers.

2. Methodology

The methodology presents the research design, the sample and sampling technique and the research instrument.

Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design which entails the process of gathering information from a representative sample of a population.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size consisted of 15 Principals, 75 Heads of Departments (HODs) and 300 class teachers. The sample was selected using multistage sampling technique. Three States (Ondo, Osun, Lagos States) and five Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected from the States using simple random sampling technique. From each LGA, 15 secondary schools were randomly selected. From each school, one principal was selected purposively based on the number of schools selected; five HODs (Languages, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Sciences and Arts) and 20 class teachers were selected purposively based on the subject taught by each teacher.

Research Instruments

Two instruments, titled "Work Commitment Scale" (WCS) and "Teachers' Job Performance Scale" (TJPS) were used to elicit information from the respondents for this study. The two instruments were adapted from the previous works of different researchers. WCS was administered on the HODs and Teachers, while TJPS was used to collect information from the principals concerning this study being carried out.

3. Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the research question, hypotheses and discussion of findings

Research Question1: What is the level of job performance of secondary school teachers?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Principals' Responses to Items on Teacher Job Performance Scale

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD
	My Subordinate:		
1.	is easily accessible for classes etc.	3.00	.57
2.	uses his/her capabilities fully	2.91	.54
3.	provides clear information about objectives, content and evaluation technique	2.91	.62
4.	pursues the set goals of the institution	2.88	.65
5.	is self-directed and works well with minimal supervision	2.84	.72
6.	communicates clearly and effectively both orally and in writing	2.92	.68
7.	encourages team work	2.76	.76
8.	is ready to accept responsibility	2.91	.66
9.	performs his/her work enthusiastically	2.82	.69
10.	is usually punctual at work	2.81	.81
11.	works towards peace and cooperation in his/her relationship with colleagues and students	2.90	.82
12.	has the ability to apply the established curriculum with a certain amount of flexibility for a class dynamics	2.96	.63
13.	is actively involved in extracurricular activities	2.64	.80
14.	records students' work regularly	3.02	.75
15.	usually creates good classroom climate	2.94	.65
16.	makes use of appropriate instructional materials	2.81	.65
17.	is resourceful and innovative in his/her ideas	2.99	.58
18.	demonstrates continuous learning by staying abreast of new development in job-related skills	2.92	.71
19.	has impart on students' discipline and behaviour	2.62	.92
20.	accepts new challenges	2.84	.78

The responses were then added together to build a single measure of teachers' job performance. The mean and standard deviation of the scores were respectively 57.414 and 6.566 while the minimum and maximum scores were 46 and 79. Teachers whose rated scores on this scale were 1 SD below the mean (that is, 46-51) score were adjudged as low level of job performance, those with scores 52 through 64(1 SD above the mean score) were adjudged as average level of job performance while those with 65 and above were adjudged as high level of job performance. The summary of the results is then presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Job Performance Level of Secondary School Teachers in Southwestern Nigeria

Level of Job Performance	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Low	44	15.7
Average	190	67.9
High	46	16.4
Total	280	100.0

Research Question 2: What is the level of work commitment of the secondary school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis Responses to Items on Work Commitment Scale

S/N	ITEMS	HODs		Principals	
	I see my subordinate as someone who…	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	has a proper pride of the school	2.91	.53	2.90	.68
2.	desires to continue teaching without economic needs	2.57	.73	2.41	.81
3.	is proud of being a teacher	2.96	.57	2.94	.65
4.	tries to do the best for the unsuccessful students	2.72	.62	2.75	.73
5.	works hard for the school to achieve its objectives	2.93	.57	2.96	.68
6.	accomplishes the job with enthusiasm	2.86	.62	2.86	.71
7.	perceives the values of teaching occupation more important than those of other professional values	2.84	.60	2.81	.69
8.	desires to be well-known in teaching profession	2.78	.65	2.74	.75
9.	spends time with the students on subjects (activities) related with the lesson outside the classroom.	2.72	.73	2.78	.78
10.	gets information about the student's family life.	2.44	.85	2.58	.91
11.	takes the responsibility of teaching the class on time	2.94	.66	3.03	.66
12.	enjoys teaching	2.99	.65	2.98	.59
13.	adheres to necessary corrections and advise from me, other teachers and parents	2.68	.86	2.83	.91
14.	is not only concern about the academics of the student but their total development	2.84	.70	2.79	.81

15.	sets an educational goal and works very hard to achieve it	2.77	.73	2.93	.72
16.	has strong affiliation to the school	2.76	.68	2.76	.72
17.	shows concern with the problem of the school	2.81	.65	2.84	.62
18.	has an obligation to remain in the school	2.51	.85	2.46	.90
19.	is interested in the future the school	2.72	.68	2.85	.72
20.	is emotionally attached to the school	2.49	.87	2.42	.90

The average of these scores was then calculated and used as an individual teacher's assessment on work commitment scale. The mean and standard deviation of the scores were respectively 55.439 and 5.468 while the minimum and maximum scores were 36.5 and 68.0.

Teachers whose rated scores on this scale were 1 SD below the mean (that is, 36.5-50) score were adjudged as low level of work commitment, those with scores 51 through 61(1 SD above the mean score) were adjudged as moderate level of work commitment while those with 62 and above were adjudged as high level of work commitment.

Table 4: Work Commitment Level of Secondary School Teachers in Southwestern Nigeria

Level of Teacher work commitment	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Low	30	10.7
Moderate	202	72.1
High	48	17.1
Total	280	100.0

Research Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of work commitment on job performance of secondary school teachers.

Table 5: Chi-square Analysis of Influence of Work Commitment on Job Performance of Secondary School Teachers

Level of Teacher work commitment	Level of Job Performance				χ^2	df	P
	Low	Average	High	Total			
Low	8	20	2	30	49.942	4	.000
Moderate	32	150	20	202			
High	4	20	24	48			
Total	44	190	46	280			

As shown in the table, the result of a Chi-square test indicated a significant influence of work commitment on job performance of public secondary school teachers, χ^2 (n = 280) = 49.942, df = 4, p = .000. This result concluded that there is significant influence of influence of work commitment on job performance of secondary school teachers.

Table 6 shows post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) test.

Table 6: Post-hoc test of Multiple Comparisons of Teachers' Work Commitment level on their Job Performance

Multiple Comparisons						
Teacher Job Performance Tukey HSD						
(I) Level of Teacher work commitment	(J) Level of Teacher work commitment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound

Low	Moderate	-3.87591*	1.16248	.003	-6.6152	-1.1366
	High	-10.21667*	1.38276	.000	-13.4750	-6.9584
Moderate	Low	3.87591*	1.16248	.003	1.1366	6.6152
	High	-6.34076*	.95401	.000	-8.5888	-4.0927
High	Low	10.21667*	1.38276	.000	6.9584	13.4750
	Moderate	6.34076*	.95401	.000	4.0927	8.5888
*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

The result shows that teachers with low level of work commitment (M=52.87, SD=4.10) were significantly different from those with moderate as well as high levels of work commitment. Also, teachers with moderate level of work commitment (M=56.74, SD=5.45) were significantly different from those with low as well as high levels of work commitment. Furthermore, it was revealed that teachers with high level of work commitment (M=63.08, SD=8.40) were significantly different from those with low as well as moderate levels of work commitment.

4. Discussion of Findings

The results of the first research question showed that most secondary school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria possessed average or moderate level of job performance while just few of the teachers possessed low or high level of job performance. Therefore, as shown from the findings of this study, it seems logical to suggest that moderate level of job performance will lead to a positive or high educational outcome. Students whose teacher has average job performance may perform averagely and not excellently, while students whose teacher has a low level of job performance might perform worse in and outside the classroom and this will only produce outright failure. No wonder most secondary schools in Southwestern Nigeria cannot boast of excellent educational output. Low level of job performance may also affect the productivity of the school at large. One can then infer that teachers' level of job performance may increase or decline from either higher level to lower level or from moderate level to lower level or even from lower level to higher level if their personality trait and commitment to work set in. Therefore, the importance of teachers' job performance cannot be underestimated.

The result on the second research question showed that most of the secondary school teachers in Southwestern Nigeria possessed moderate level of work commitment while few secondary school teachers in the State possessed low or high level of work commitment. In the educational setting, moderate commitment to work by teachers is not enough to achieve productivity. Teachers need to strive to achieve high level of work commitment. In line with this, Nwosu in his study observed that teachers with high level of commitment worked harder, demonstrated strong affiliation to their schools, and showed more desire to carry out the goals of teaching than teachers with low level of commitment (Nwosu, 2012). More importantly, pupils of highly committed teachers are more likely to learn materials and develop positive attitude towards school than those of teachers with low level of commitment.

From the findings in research question one and two, it was discovered that teachers' level of work commitment and job performance is moderate. The researcher discovered from the field trip factors that may likely be responsible for the moderate level of teachers work commitment and job performance. Some of such factors are: late payment of salary, poor classroom structure, irregular promotion, workload and lack of teaching facilities. These factors may likely hinder the high level of teachers' job performance and commitment to work and moderate level will not make teachers achieve their best in the educational sector. There will always be a marginal difference in the output of teachers with high level of job performance and work commitment compared to those with moderate level or low level. Ahiauzu *et, al.* also examined that motivation through rewards and incentives help the teachers to improve their job performance (Ahiazu et al., 2011).

It was also discovered in this study that there was significant influence of work commitment on the performance of secondary school teachers. This collaborates with the work of Ezinwa *et al.*(2021) which study employee commitment and organizational performance. The result of multiple regression analysis shows that affective commitment has a significant positive association influence on organizational performance and Sheldon et al. (2004) study on whether teacher competence and commitment improve teacher's professionalism. The results showed that teacher competence and commitment was significantly positive on the performance of professional teachers. From the result, we can suggest that the more a teacher is ready to identify with the school and involve in the goals and objectives of the school, the more influence it has on his or her job performance. This indicated that the level of teachers' commitment to work could either affect the school positively or negatively thereby determining the level of job performance he or she is likely to possess at work.

8. Conclusion

The present study established the fact that a large percentage of teachers in Southwestern Nigeria had average level of job performance and this had predisposed them to execute their tasks to a reasonable extent. It also determined that the work commitment level of the teachers was average and there could be better productivity if their commitment to work move from the average to higher level.

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Ethical Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Teacher Education: Opportunities, Risks and Policy Implications

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Abstract: The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational systems is transforming teaching–learning processes, assessment practices, and institutional decision-making. In teacher education, AI-powered tools such as adaptive learning systems, automated feedback mechanisms, generative AI platforms, and predictive analytics offer significant opportunities for personalization, efficiency, and professional development. However, these innovations raise critical ethical concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, academic integrity, equity, transparency, and professional autonomy. This conceptual paper examines the ethical dimensions of AI integration in teacher education, with specific focus on fairness in assessment, inclusivity, data governance, and the evolving role of teachers. Drawing upon contemporary literature in educational technology, digital ethics, and policy frameworks, the paper proposes an ethical integration framework grounded in principles of transparency, accountability, human oversight, and contextual sensitivity. The analysis highlights that while AI can enhance pedagogical effectiveness and support differentiated instruction, unregulated implementation risks reinforcing social inequities and compromising professional ethics. The paper argues for structured ethical guidelines, curriculum-level digital ethics training for pre-service teachers, and policy alignment to ensure responsible AI adoption. The study contributes to ongoing discourse on modern innovations and ethical practices in education by offering a balanced, research-informed framework for integrating AI responsibly within teacher education programs.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Teacher Education, Digital Ethics, Educational Technology, Policy Implications

1. Introduction

The accelerating integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into educational systems marks a structural transformation in pedagogical practice, assessment practices, and institutional governance worldwide. AI-driven technologies such as adaptive learning systems, predictive analytics, automated feedback engines, and generative AI platforms are increasingly embedded within higher education environments (Holmes et al., 2019; Luckin et al., 2016; bod-Richter et al., 2019). Educational data science and learning analytics have further enabled institutions to monitor student performance, model learning trajectories, and inform administrative decision-making (Williamson & Eynon, 2020; Prinsloo & Slade, 2017).

In the Indian context, this technological shift coincides with systemic reforms articulated in the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes digital infrastructure, technology-enabled teacher development, and innovation ecosystems in higher education. The establishment of the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) reflects policy-level recognition of AI's transformative potential. However, while NEP 2020 foregrounds technological advancement, it provides limited guidance on how Artificial Intelligence should be ethically governed and regulated within teacher education. This absence underscores the need for structured conceptual engagement.

Although AI promises personalization, efficiency, and data-informed instructional design, researchers caution that simply introducing technology does not automatically lead to educational progress. Technologies are not neutral instruments in fact they reflect values, priorities that are built into its design and algorithms. (Selwyn, 2019; Boddington, 2017). Algorithmic systems trained on historical datasets may reproduce or amplify existing social inequities, particularly in linguistically diverse and socio-economically stratified societies such as India (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). Concerns surrounding algorithmic opacity, data surveillance, and decision-making transparency have therefore become central to debates on AI in education (Beer & Tickner, 2019; Kimmons & Hall, 2016).

Teacher education is a particularly significant field for studying these developments. As it is responsible for preparing future educators, it shapes professional norms, ethical reasoning, and pedagogical orientations. AI integration in teacher education thus influences not only instructional tools but also the beliefs, knowledge perspectives, and ethical values that future teachers bring into their classrooms. Research indicates that while teacher preparation programs increasingly introduce digital tools, ethical literacy concerning algorithmic systems remains insufficiently developed (Bhagat & Kim, 2020; Micheli & Ciampi Stancova, 2021). Without critical engagement, AI may encourage increased monitoring, rigid standardization, and reduced freedom for teachers to make professional decisions.

Theoretical perspectives from sociotechnical systems theory help explain this concern more clearly. Sociotechnical theory suggests that technology and social institutions influence and shape each other. When new technologies are introduced, they can change professional roles, systems of knowledge, and structures of accountability (Johri & Winn, 2019). In education, AI-based assessment tools may gradually shift the meaning of valid knowledge by giving more importance to measurable results than to contextual or professional judgment (Kalantzis & Cope, 2018). Likewise, predictive analytics can shape expectations about student performance and may unintentionally strengthen negative or deficit-based assumptions if they are not used carefully and critically (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017).

Within the Indian policy landscape, the NEP 2020 envisions a technologically empowered teaching workforce capable of leveraging digital platforms for inclusive education. Yet inclusivity in AI-mediated systems requires more than infrastructural expansion. Equity demands algorithmic fairness, contextual sensitivity, and safeguards against linguistic and socio-cultural bias (Zhao & Zhang, 2022). In a multilingual and demographically heterogeneous nation, dataset representation and model training assumptions become ethically significant considerations.

Furthermore, the emergence of generative AI tools has intensified concerns regarding academic integrity and authorship norms within teacher preparation programs. While generative systems can support idea generation and instructional planning, unregulated use may disrupt formative assessment processes and diminish opportunities for authentic reflective writing (Ng, 2021; Zhao & Zhang, 2022). These developments call for the systematic integration of ethical reasoning into teacher education curricula.

Against this backdrop, the present study advances the following research question:

In what ways can a conceptual ethical framework guide AI adoption in Indian teacher education to promote equity, professional autonomy, and accountability?

To address this question, the paper synthesizes implications of AI-in-education (Holmes et al., 2019; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), learning analytics governance debates (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017; Beer & Tickner, 2019), and critical algorithm studies (O'Neil, 2016; Williamson & Eynon, 2020) with Indian educational reform discourse under NEP 2020. By situating AI integration within normative, theoretical, and policy dimensions, the study moves beyond instrumental narratives toward a principled model of ethical implementation tailored to Indian teacher education institutions.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Sociotechnical Systems, Critical Algorithm Studies, and Professional Ethics in Teaching

AI as a Sociotechnical System

Artificial Intelligence in education must be conceptualized not merely as a computational tool but as a sociotechnical system embedded within institutional, cultural, and policy environments. Sociotechnical theory argues that technological systems and social structures co-evolve; they shape and constrain one another (Johri & Winn, 2019). In this framework, AI adoption is not simply an implementation decision but a reconfiguration of pedagogical authority, evaluation standards, and governance processes.

Educational data infrastructures, including learning analytics platforms, reshape institutional decision-making by privileging quantifiable indicators of performance (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). Metrics such as engagement frequency, predictive risk scores, and automated grading outputs increasingly influence pedagogical judgments. From a sociotechnical perspective, such changes can redefine what is considered valid evidence of learning and may sideline the contextual and relational aspects of teaching that cannot easily be measured (Kalantzis & Cope, 2018).

In Indian teacher education institutions, where diversity of language, socio-economic status, and digital access remains uneven, sociotechnical considerations become particularly important. AI systems trained predominantly on English-language datasets or urban-centered learning patterns may inadequately reflect rural or multilingual realities. Thus, technological architecture intersects with structural inequality, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive ethical frameworks (Zhao & Zhang, 2022).

Critical Algorithm Studies and Algorithmic Bias

Critical algorithm studies provide an additional theoretical lens for examining AI integration. This section emphasizes that algorithms are not neutral decision-makers, but they embed normative assumptions shaped by data selection, model design, and optimization priorities (O'Neil, 2016; Selwyn, 2019). Algorithmic systems often reproduce historical inequities present within training datasets, a phenomenon widely documented across sectors.

In educational settings, algorithmic bias can appear when predictive systems disproportionately identify students from marginalized communities as "at risk," or when automated assessment tools fail to fairly evaluate non-standard forms of language expression (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). In multilingual contexts such as India, linguistic bias in AI-driven grading tools may inadvertently disadvantage students who use hybrid or regionally influenced English.

Furthermore, algorithmic opacity, commonly described as the "black box" problem, constrains the interpretability and transparency of automated decisions (Kimmons & Hall, 2016). Without explainability mechanisms, teacher educators may rely on outputs without understanding underlying assumptions. This undermines professional judgment and accountability, particularly when algorithmic outputs influence assessment or progression decisions.

Critical scholarship therefore calls for algorithmic transparency, fairness auditing, and participatory design models in educational technology development (Micheli & Ciampi Stancova, 2021). In teacher education, such measures are especially vital because future educators must develop the capacity to critically interrogate technological tools rather than internalize them as authoritative.

Professional Ethics in Teaching

Professional ethics in teaching provide a normative anchor for AI integration debates. Teaching has historically been conceptualized as a relational, context-sensitive profession grounded in care, autonomy, and moral responsibility (Spector, 2020). Ethical teaching requires discretionary judgment, responsiveness to student needs, and contextual interpretation beyond standardized metrics.

AI systems, however, often operate through optimization logic, maximizing efficiency, predictive accuracy, or measurable performance indicators (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). When such logic is uncritically adopted, it may narrow the moral horizon of teaching to quantifiable outcomes. Professional autonomy risks erosion if educators feel compelled to align instructional strategies strictly with algorithmic recommendations (James & Pal, 2022).

In the Indian context, NEP 2020 emphasizes teacher empowerment, holistic development, and competency-based learning. These values resonate with ethical traditions that prioritize human-centered pedagogy. Yet the policy simultaneously promotes digital platforms and analytics-based monitoring. This dual emphasis creates normative question of how can digital governance frameworks be balanced with the preservation of professional autonomy?

Resolving this tension requires reframing AI as augmentative rather than substitutive. Ethical integration demands that AI systems support reflective practice, differentiated instruction, and formative feedback without displacing human interpretive authority (Ng, 2021). Teacher education curricula must therefore incorporate structured engagement with AI ethics, enabling pre-service teachers to evaluate technological recommendations critically.

Normative Ethical Principles: Justice, Accountability, and Transparency

Beyond sociotechnical and professional lenses, normative ethical theory provides guiding principles for AI integration. Concepts of distributive justice and fairness are central when evaluating algorithmic outcomes that affect diverse student populations (Boddington, 2017). In contexts marked by digital divides, equitable AI adoption requires proactive inclusion measures rather than post hoc correction.

Accountability requires that decision-making authority remain clear, traceable, and open to review. Automated systems should not obscure responsibility; instead, human oversight is essential to ensure that outcomes can be questioned and challenged when necessary (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). Transparency becomes especially important as data collection expands within digital governance frameworks, helping to build institutional trust and legitimacy.

For Indian teacher education institutions navigating NEP 2020 implementation, these ethical principles offer structural orientation. Rather than perceiving AI as an inevitable modernization pathway, institutions must evaluate its compatibility with constitutional commitments to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

These insights collectively justify the need for a structured conceptual framework tailored to Indian teacher education. Such a framework must ensure that technological adoption aligns with professional values and national reform objectives under NEP 2020, while mitigating algorithmic risk and governance opacity.

2.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

AI in Education: Promise and Challenges

Researches on Artificial Intelligence in education highlights its potential to revolutionize teaching–learning processes through personalization, real-time feedback, and adaptive technologies (Luckin et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2019). AI systems can analyse large datasets to tailor learning pathways and identify students’ learning gaps (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In higher education, AI-enabled analytics are linked to improved retention, targeted support, and predictive decision-making (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

However, recent research also emphasizes that AI’s potential gains are not automatic; they depend on contextual adaptation and alignment with pedagogical values (Ng, 2021; Tuomi, 2018). A systematic review by Zawacki-Richter and colleagues (2019) identifies four major AI functions in education; learning support, assessment, administrative support, and analytics but notes ethical concerns about privacy and fairness.

AI and Teacher Education

AI's role in teacher preparation has gained increasing scholarly interest. Studies indicate that AI can support reflective teaching by simulating classroom environments and providing adaptive feedback to pre-service teachers (Ng, 2021; Bhagat & Kim, 2020). For example, intelligent tutoring systems help student teachers practice instructional strategies in virtual scenarios before actual school placements (Micheli & Ciampi Stancova, 2021).

Nevertheless, Prinsloo and Slade (2017) argue that AI tools often emphasize technical execution rather than pedagogical reasoning, leading to surface learning of technological skills without grounding in reflective critique. Research from higher education also notes that teacher educators themselves feel unprepared to integrate AI meaningfully without ethical training (James & Pal, 2022; Bhagat & Kim, 2020).

Learning Analytics and Assessment Ethics

Learning analytics represents a key dimension of AI integration. While analytics can inform personalized instruction, its ethical implications have been extensively debated. Prinsloo and Slade (2017) warn that analytics often operate with insufficient attention to students' consent, privacy, and interpretability. If left unregulated, analytics systems run the risk of prioritizing efficiency over educational dignity and contextual understanding (Beer & Tickner, 2019; Ifenthaler & Schumacher, 2016).

In terms of assessment, automated essay scoring and algorithm-driven performance evaluation have been both lauded for efficiency and critiqued for potential bias (Williamson & Eynon, 2020; O'Neil, 2016). Evidence suggests that automated grading systems may undervalue linguistic diversity, particularly for learners outside dominant language contexts (Pardos & Heffernan, 2017). In multicultural settings such as India, this concern gains magnitude due to heterogeneity in linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds (Zhao & Zhang, 2022).

Algorithmic Bias and Transparency

Algorithmic bias is one of the most significant ethical concerns while incorporating AI in education. O'Neil (2016) demonstrates that predictive systems can inadvertently reinforce social inequity when trained on historically biased data. Similar concerns are now documented in educational technology: algorithms that predict academic risk may reflect underlying inequities in access, resources, or measured performance (Yang et al., 2021; Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Transparency and explainability are considered key ethical design principles. Without explainability, educators are unable to understand how AI systems arrive at specific recommendations or decisions (Kimmons & Hall, 2016). Transparency is crucial for accountability and for teachers to retain interpretive agency, especially when algorithmic output influences high-stakes decisions (Zhang & Lai, 2023; Micheli & Ciampi Stancova, 2021).

Data Governance and Privacy Concerns

The increasing use of AI platforms entails extensive data collection behavioral, performance, and demographic information. While data can enable personalized learning, it also poses privacy risks. Research indicates that poorly governed data infrastructures can lead to breaches or misuse, particularly in contexts with limited regulatory frameworks (Beer & Tickner, 2019; Tuomi, 2018).

In India, the debate around educational data governance remains at an early stage, although it is steadily expanding. The proposed Digital Personal Data Protection Bill (2023) reflects growing policy awareness in India regarding the importance of safeguarding personal data and protecting individual privacy in an increasingly digital environment. While the legislation establishes general principles governing data collection, consent, processing, and security, it does not provide sector-specific guidance tailored to educational institutions. Explicit regulatory frameworks addressing AI-driven assessment systems, predictive analytics, and algorithmic decision-making in teacher education remain underdeveloped. Consequently, although privacy concerns are formally acknowledged at the national level, clear and context-sensitive mechanisms for governing AI-enabled educational data practices continue to require further elaboration and institutional adaptation.

Professional Ethics and Autonomy in Teacher Education

Professional ethics in teaching emphasizes relational judgment, contextual interpretation, and commitment to learner welfare (Spector, 2020). While AI can enhance efficiency, scholars caution that uncritical adoption may erode professional autonomy by privileging algorithmic authority over teacher discretion (James & Pal, 2022; Selwyn, 2019).

The construct of "teacher agency" has become central in contemporary discourse on educational technology. Agency refers to the capacity to act purposefully and ethically within complex learning environments. Research suggests that AI should augment and not replace teacher agency through technologies that support reflective practice and pedagogical decision-making (Johri & Winn, 2019).

Indian Policy Context: NEP 2020 and Technology Integration

The National Education Policy 2020 positions technology as a catalyst for educational reform, including teacher education. NEP 2020 advocates the use of digital tools for professional development, remote learning, and analytics-based decision support. Yet it is observed that NEP 2020 lacks explicit ethical guidelines for AI implementation (Pal, 2025). Studies analysing policy implementation in India highlight a gap between technological aspirations and ethical preparedness (Dhokare, 2024). Unless teacher education institutions develop internal frameworks for ethical technology use, the risk of reproducing inequities and professional marginalization will persist.

2.2 Research Gap

Although existing literature engages with AI possibilities and limitations in education, few studies offer a structured ethical framework specific to teacher education in India. International frameworks emphasize transparency, fairness, and accountability (Zhao & Zhang, 2022; Micheli & Ciampi Stancova, 2021), yet localized perspectives remain underarticulated. This study bridges that gap by developing a normative conceptual framework that aligns with Indian policy objectives and educational values.

3.0 Conceptual Framework for Ethical Ai Integration in Teacher Education

To ensure responsible adoption of Artificial Intelligence in teacher education, this paper proposes a conceptual framework grounded in five interrelated ethical principles: transparency, accountability, equity, human oversight, and professional autonomy. These principles function as guiding pillars for integrating AI tools within teacher preparation programs (Floridi et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2019; Williamson & Eynon, 2020). The framework aligns with broader global AI ethics discourse while contextualizing its relevance within educational institutions.

3.1 Transparency and Explainability

Transparency requires that AI systems used in teacher education be understandable and explainable to users (Miller, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Pre-service teachers must be aware of how algorithms function, what data they rely upon, and how outputs are generated. Explainable AI fosters trust and enable educators to critically evaluate automated decisions rather than accept them as neutral or infallible (Selwyn, 2019).

Teacher education institutions should incorporate foundational modules on AI literacy, enabling future teachers to interpret algorithmic outcomes and understand their limitations (Ng, 2021; Holmes et al., 2022). Without explainability, algorithmic systems risk becoming "black boxes" that undermine professional judgment and democratic accountability (O'Neil, 2016).

3.2 Accountability and Governance

Accountability ensures that humans remain responsible for decisions influenced by AI systems (Floridi et al., 2018; Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). While AI may assist in assessment, feedback, or predictive analytics, final judgments must involve human review to prevent over-automation and ethical diffusion (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Institutions should establish clear governance mechanisms, including ethical review committees, algorithmic audit processes, and robust data protection policies (Beer & Tickner, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Defining responsibility boundaries prevents over-reliance on automated systems and safeguards professional standards. In educational settings, governance structures are particularly critical because decision-making directly affects student trajectories and professional certification (Holmes et al., 2019).

3.3 Equity and Inclusivity

AI integration must prioritize fairness and inclusivity. Algorithms trained on biased datasets may reinforce disparities across socio-economic, linguistic, or cultural groups (O'Neil, 2016; Zhao & Zhang, 2022). In diverse educational contexts, predictive systems may inadvertently privilege dominant linguistic or socio-economic profiles unless fairness mechanisms are intentionally embedded (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017).

Teacher education programs should emphasize critical examination of dataset representation, fairness metrics, and inclusive design principles (Holmes et al., 2022; Ng, 2021). Ethical AI adoption requires ongoing monitoring to detect and correct unintended discriminatory outcomes, especially in contexts characterized by digital and structural inequality (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

3.4 Human Oversight and Pedagogical Judgment

Education fundamentally relies on relational, contextual, and human-centered interactions (Biesta, 2015). AI tools should augment, not replace pedagogical judgment (Holmes et al., 2019; Tuomi, 2018). While AI can enhance differentiation, formative assessment, and feedback mechanisms, it cannot replicate moral reasoning, empathy, or contextual sensitivity inherent in professional teaching practice.

In teacher education, pre-service teachers must be trained to use AI as a supportive instrument while retaining responsibility for contextual decision-making (Ng, 2021). Human oversight ensures that ethical reasoning and reflective practice remain central to classroom engagement, preventing technological determinism from overshadowing pedagogical values (Selwyn, 2019).

3.5 Preservation of Professional Autonomy

Excessive automation may constrain teacher agency by standardizing instructional practices through algorithmic recommendations (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). Ethical integration safeguards professional autonomy by positioning AI as advisory rather than prescriptive (Floridi et al., 2018). Teacher education institutions should cultivate critical technological agency, encouraging future teachers to question, modify, and contextualize AI-based suggestions rather than follow them mechanically (Holmes et al., 2022). Preserving autonomy aligns with broader professional ethics frameworks that define teaching as a discretionary, judgment-based profession (Biesta, 2015).

3.6 A Three-Level Integration Model

Building on the above principles, ethical AI integration in teacher education can be conceptualized across three levels:

1. Curricular Level – Inclusion of AI ethics, data literacy, and digital criticality within teacher preparation courses (Ng, 2021; UNESCO, 2021).
2. Institutional Level – Establishment of data governance frameworks, transparency policies, and review mechanisms (Beer & Tickner, 2019; Prinsloo & Slade, 2017).
3. Classroom Practice Level – Responsible and reflective application of AI tools under structured human supervision (Holmes et al., 2019; Selwyn, 2019).

This multi-level approach ensures that ethical considerations are embedded structurally rather than addressed reactively, promoting sustainable and context-sensitive AI adoption within teacher education institutions (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

4. Opportunities and Risks of AI in Teacher Education

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in teacher education presents a dual reality: transformative pedagogical opportunities alongside significant ethical and professional risks (Holmes et al., 2019; Williamson & Eynon, 2020). A balanced understanding of both dimensions is essential for responsible adoption, particularly within contexts undergoing rapid digital reform.

4.1 Opportunities

Personalized Professional Learning

AI-driven platforms can tailor learning pathways for pre-service teachers based on their competencies, performance patterns, and learning needs (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Adaptive systems provide customized feedback, helping student-teachers strengthen lesson planning, assessment strategies, and classroom management skills (Holmes et al., 2022).

Such personalization supports reflective practice and continuous professional growth, aligning with competency-based models of teacher preparation (Ng, 2021).

Enhanced Reflective Practice

Simulation tools and AI-supported classroom scenarios allow pre-service teachers to engage in structured virtual teaching experiences (Tuomi, 2018). These systems can analyze instructional decisions and provide targeted feedback, promoting deeper pedagogical reflection (Holmes et al., 2019). When used responsibly, AI can function as a formative support mechanism that complements, rather than replaces, mentor supervision and peer dialogue (Selwyn, 2019).

Data-Informed Pedagogical Decision-Making

AI analytics enable teacher educators to monitor learning trends, identify areas of difficulty, and refine instructional strategies (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). Such data-informed approaches support evidence-based teacher preparation and align with contemporary accountability frameworks in higher education (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). However, effective implementation requires critical interpretation rather than unquestioned reliance on algorithmic outputs.

Administrative Efficiency

Automated grading systems, plagiarism detection tools, and learning management analytics can reduce administrative workload (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Efficiency gains allow faculty members to allocate more time to mentoring, research, and curriculum development. When combined with ethical safeguards and transparency mechanisms, such tools can enhance institutional productivity without compromising academic integrity (UNESCO, 2021).

4.2 Risks and Ethical Challenges

Algorithmic Bias and Inequity

AI systems trained on limited or skewed datasets may reproduce existing social, cultural, or linguistic biases (O’Neil, 2016; Zhao & Zhang, 2022). In teacher education, biased predictive analytics could influence perceptions of competence, risk categorization, or performance evaluation (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). Such outcomes may disproportionately affect student-teachers from marginalized socio-cultural backgrounds, thereby reinforcing structural inequities (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Threats to Academic Integrity

Generative AI tools raise complex concerns regarding originality, authorship, and academic honesty (Holmes et al., 2022). Excessive reliance on automated content generation may limit the development of critical thinking, reflective writing, and pedagogical reasoning skills among pre-service teachers (Selwyn, 2019). Teacher education programs must therefore explicitly address responsible AI use, emphasizing ethical authorship and transparent disclosure practices.

Data Privacy and Surveillance

AI platforms often require extensive data collection, including behavioral, performance, and engagement metrics (Beer & Tickner, 2019). Without robust data protection frameworks, institutions risk data breaches, unauthorized profiling, or misuse of sensitive information (Prinsloo & Slade, 2017). Surveillance-oriented monitoring systems may also create anxiety, reduce trust, and alter classroom dynamics by normalizing constant observation (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Erosion of Professional Judgment

Over-reliance on algorithmic recommendations may undermine teacher autonomy and pedagogical creativity (Selwyn, 2019). When AI systems standardize instructional decisions through predictive modeling or automated feedback, they may limit contextual responsiveness an essential component of effective teaching (Biesta, 2015). Ethical AI integration requires preserving discretionary professional judgment while leveraging technological support.

4.3 The Need for Balanced Integration

The opportunities offered by AI in teacher education are substantial, yet they must be pursued with ethical vigilance (Floridi et al., 2018). Institutions should avoid adopting technology solely for innovation appeal or policy alignment. Instead, AI integration must be guided by pedagogical relevance, social responsibility, and professional ethics (UNESCO, 2021).

A careful balance between technological efficiency and human-centered education is therefore essential. AI should function as an augmentative tool that strengthens teacher competence while preserving core values such as equity, accountability, and professional autonomy (Holmes et al., 2019; Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

5. Policy and Practice Implications

The ethical integration of Artificial Intelligence in teacher education requires coordinated efforts at policy, institutional, and pedagogical levels AI adoption is not merely a technological upgrade but a governance and professional responsibility issue that must be systematically addressed (Williamson & Eynon, 2020). The following implications emerge from the conceptual analysis.

5.1 Curriculum Reform in Teacher Education

Teacher preparation programs must formally incorporate modules on AI literacy, digital ethics, and data governance. Beyond technical proficiency, pre-service teachers should develop competencies in:

- Understanding algorithmic functioning and limitations
- Identifying bias in AI systems
- Practicing responsible AI-assisted assessment
- Upholding academic integrity in technology-mediated environments

Embedding AI ethics within curriculum frameworks ensures that technological competence is accompanied by critical and moral reasoning.

5.2 Institutional Ethical Governance Frameworks

Higher education institutions should establish structured governance mechanisms to regulate AI adoption. These may include:

- Institutional AI ethics committees
- Transparent data usage policies
- Regular audits of AI tools for bias and fairness
- Clear accountability guidelines defining human oversight

Such frameworks promote responsible implementation and prevent uncritical technological dependence.

5.3 Professional Development for Teacher Educators

Faculty members themselves require continuous professional development to navigate AI tools responsibly. Workshops, faculty development programmes, and collaborative learning communities can enhance digital criticality and ethical awareness among teacher educators.

Without adequate faculty preparedness, AI integration risks remaining superficial or technologically deterministic.

5.4 Student-Centered AI Policies

AI policies must prioritize learner well-being, equity, and privacy. Institutions should:

- Ensure informed consent regarding data collection
- Maintain strict data protection measures
- Avoid surveillance-based monitoring systems
- Encourage ethical AI usage guidelines rather than punitive control

A trust-based approach strengthens ethical culture within teacher education environments.

5.5 Alignment with Broader Educational Policy

National and institutional educational reforms increasingly emphasize digital transformation. However, policy frameworks must explicitly address ethical dimensions of AI use. Teacher education institutions should advocate for policy documents that integrate innovation with safeguards for fairness, transparency, and professional autonomy.

Collectively, these policy and practice implications highlight that ethical AI integration is not merely a technical adjustment but a structural transformation requiring coordinated governance, curriculum reform, and professional responsibility.

6. Conclusion

The integration of Artificial Intelligence into teacher education represents a significant shift in the pedagogical and institutional landscape of higher education. AI technologies offer meaningful opportunities to enhance personalized learning, strengthen reflective practice, and support data-informed instructional decisions. When thoughtfully implemented, these tools can contribute to more adaptive, efficient, and responsive teacher preparation systems.However, technological advancement without ethical grounding poses substantial risks. Algorithmic bias, data privacy concerns, threats to academic integrity, and the erosion of professional autonomy underscore the necessity of cautious and principled adoption. Teacher education institutions, as the formative spaces for future educators, bear a critical responsibility to ensure that innovation aligns with the core values of equity, transparency, accountability, and human dignity.

This paper has argued that ethical integration must operate at curricular, institutional, and classroom practice levels. Embedding AI literacy and digital ethics within teacher education curricula, establishing governance mechanisms, and preserving human oversight are essential to maintaining the moral foundations of education in technologically evolving contexts.

Ultimately, Artificial Intelligence should function as an augmentative tool rather than a substitute for professional judgment. The future of teacher education depends not merely on technological sophistication but on the capacity to harmonize innovation with ethical responsibility. A human-centered approach to AI integration ensures that education remains grounded in empathy, critical inquiry, and social justice while embracing modern advancements.

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Educational Violence Against Girls and Children at Home: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract: This study investigates the widespread problems of domestic violence against girls and children. Despite advancements in gender equality and child protection worldwide, many girls and children still experience various forms of violence that hinder their ability to learn. The literature review explored the complexity of this issue, including neglect, discrimination, and cultural barriers, in addition to physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. The study is descriptive, and the data were gathered from secondary sources, including articles, books, journals, theses, and websites. The objective of this study is to compile existing research, focus on the incidence and forms of domestic violence against females and children in school settings, and examine the effects of this violence on individuals' academic success, mental health, and future prospects. This study examined the underlying causes and sustaining elements of this occurrence, including deeply rooted gender stereotypes, socioeconomic inequalities, and deficient legal frameworks. The measures and laws implemented to stop educational violence in domestic settings are critically reviewed, with both achievements and problems highlighted. This study aims to suggest how communities, governments, and academic institutions can collaborate to create safer and more welcoming environments for girls and children where their right to education is protected and promoted. This study evaluated the efficacy of various strategies and initiatives. This study clarifies the problem of domestic and educational violence against girls and children, laying the groundwork for future studies, activism, and policy creation intended to eliminate this global concern.

Keywords: Abuse, Academic success, Cultural barriers, Discrimination, Domestic violence, Socioeconomic inequalities.

1. Introduction

Child and girl violence is a widespread and infiltrating issue with wide-reaching negative implications on millions of juvenile people all over the world. The domestic sphere is supposed to play a protective role, but much of the time, it turns into the source of violence, abuse, and neglect, becoming the place where girls and children experience pain. Educational violence is one type of violence that has been least considered and reported upon; it occurs when children are denied access to education or forced into quitting school, or when they are physically, emotionally, or psychologically abused in such a way that it inhibits their learning abilities. Domestic educational violence is a complicated, multidimensional issue that is firmly rooted in social standards, cultural beliefs, and economic statuses. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF, 2020) indicates that there are an estimated 150 million girls and children all around the world who are exposed to domestic violence, with a significant portion being exposed to further educational violence.

The consequences of educational violence are far-reaching and devastating, and they give rise to low academic performance, low self-esteem, and high probability of dropping out of school (Assefa et al., 2023). Although it is a serious issue, domestic educational violence is not very visible or given due importance; most of the cases go unreported, and the reported cases do not get the attention and necessary support (UNESCO, 2019). Poor awareness, weak policy frameworks, and limited resources have all been involved in the perpetration of this type of violence against girls and children in the home. This is a systematic literature review that summarises the available literature on domestic educational violence against girls and children in terms of prevalence, antecedents, consequences, and preventive measures.

Through shedding light on this important problem, the review aims at informing policymakers, educators, and practitioners, and as such enhancing the process of designing effective interventions that promote safe, inclusive and equitable learning experiences to all girls and children. The study includes a continuum of educational violence, which includes physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It also examines the risk factors, including poverty, gender inequality, and cultural norms, that increase the level of educational violence. In addition, the review also assesses the implications of such violence, that is, how it affects academic performance, mental health, and social relations. The paper highlights effective measures of preventing and reducing domestic educational violence against girls and children. The possible interventions include community-based programs, school-based interventions and reforms of policies.

The study is also able to determine the existing gaps in the existing literature and practice and provide a statement of future research and practice. In the end, this research will enhance a better understanding of domestic violence in education towards girls and children and inform the development of sound solutions to address this challenge. Girls and children who would have a safer, more supportive, and more inclusive learning environment can be developed through collaborative efforts.

2. Literature Review and Operational Definitions

According to the literature review, violence against children, including girls, is common in various environments, whether at home or in schools. Empirical research illustrates that girls are more often victims of sexual violence, and boys become more often the subjects of physical violence (Bjornseth and Szabo, 2018; Stark and Landis, 2016). There is also gender moderation of disclosure as boys are less willing to report the abuse (Bjornseth and Szabo, 2018). The study indicates that peer athletes might be the precursors of sexual violence in sport situations before coaches (Bjornseth and Szabo, 2018).

The issue of child-to-parent violence has become a problem, especially in cases of girls who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and then have a higher tendency to replicate the violence against their parents (Coogan, 2011; Herrera & Mccloskey, 2003). The literature highlights the multifaceted Ness of violence against children and the need to take a child-centred approach in intervention and prevention (Holt et al., 2008). The introduction of standard methods of measurement is crucial in the proper characterisation of violence trends in different contexts (Stark and Landis, 2016). Moreover, interactive learning spaces, including Dialogic Feminist Gatherings, have proven to be a potential solution to stop gender-based violence between adolescent girls in out-of-home care (Salceda et al., 2020).

Future studies will be needed to question protective factors and resilience in children exposed to familial violence (Herrenkohl et al., 2008).

***Educational Violence*:** Educational violence can be described as any type of physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, neglect, or exploitation in a way that hinders the ability of a child to learn, participate in an educational process, or even reach his or her full educational potential (UNESCO, 2019).

Girls and Children: In this work, the term girls and children " signifies those who are below the age of 18 and become the victims of educational violence in the household, as is characterized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989).

Home: The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) defines the domestic environment in which girls and children live with families, or caregivers and guardians.

Violence: Violence refers to any form of physical, emotional, or psychological harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation inflicted on girls and children at home, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022).

Abuse: Abuse refers to any form of physical, emotional, or psychological harm meted on girls and children within the house, including and not limited to physical punishment, emotional control or neglect (UNICEF, 2020).

Neglect: According to WHO (2018), neglect is a description of the lack of caregivers or guardians to provide girls and children with the requirements like food, shelter, clothes, education, or healthcare.

Exploitation: Exploitation is described as using girls and children to get financial, labour or sexual gains, such as child labour, trafficking or marriage, as established by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2015).

Educational Outcomes: Educational outcomes refer to the academic level of achievement, advancement, or education of girls and children, such as but not limited to grades, test results or general education level, as measured by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019).

Well-Being: The definition of well-being used by WHO (2018) is the physical, emotional, or psychological health and well-being of girls and children, including self-esteem, confidence, and life satisfaction.

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

According to the social cognitive theory (SCT), which was advanced by Albert Bandura in 1977, learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In the framework of educational violence against girls and children in homes, SCT explains how violence offenders learn behaviours and how victims can adopt or even normalize violence (Mcleod, 2016). The Ecological Systems Theory (EST) is a theory that was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) to help people understand the complex way individuals interact with their surroundings. Applied to the violence targeted at girls and children at home, EST will help to identify the complex determinants of the given phenomenon, including the individual, relationship, community, and society levels (Elliott and Davis, 2020).

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2014) introduces Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) that provides a framework through which one can comprehend the consequences of trauma on humans and communities. When applied in the design of interventions to prevent and address the sexual violence of girls and children in the household, TIC enlightens the context of violence (Goddard et al., 2021). Attachment Theory (AT), which was developed by John Bowlby (1969) and Mary Ainsworth (1978), argues that a relationship with caregivers in early years determines the attachment style of an individual and has a further effect on the interpersonal relationship patterns. In relation to educational violence against girls and home-based children, AT throws some light on the role of violent relational dynamics on the attachment orientations of children and on their future relationships (Wallin, 2015).

Systems Theory (ST), which was proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), offers a system of comprehending the issue of the complexity of interdependence of individuals, families, and communities. To examine the problem of educational violence against girls and children in the family setting, ST will help to identify the contributory factors at the level of individuals, family, community, and society (Logan, 2017). Empowerment Theory (ET) was the term suggested by Barbara Solomon (1976) and is said to occur when individuals or groups of people develop agency over their lives and their surroundings. ET has been applied in the education of violence against girls and children at home to inform the development of interventions that empower such populations to protect themselves and increase their general wellbeing (Leon, 1977).

2.2 The Significance of this Study

The research has the potential to improve the prevention and response measures for educational violence against girls and children in the home context. Through the literature review, it will enhance the knowledge of this multifaceted problem and provide the evidence that should guide policymakers, educators, and practitioners in developing effective preventive and responsive strategies. The results will contribute to the better performance of various educational establishments working with vulnerable groups, especially girls and children becoming victims of such violence, since they facilitate the use of trauma-informed responses and clarify the psychological consequences. Moreover, the research provides evidence that could be used to advance the policy changes to favor the safety and well-being of these children.

The results will also promote community interaction and sensitization about educational violence against girls and children in the house, which will lead to collective effort to punish such violence. In addition, the study will guide social work practice by developing effective interventions, which could help prevent and reduce educational violence. Finally, the research also helps achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), i.e., Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

3. Research Questions

1. What is the incidence, the expression, and the effects of educational violence on girls and children in household settings, and how do the variables vary by geographical regions, cultures and socioeconomic settings?
2. What are the underlying causes and risk factors of educational violence against girls and children at home, and how can these factors be averted using evidence-based prevention and intervention programs?

3.1. Objectives

1. To undertake a systematic literature review that addresses the topic of educational violence against girls and children in domestic environments.

2. To determine the prevalence, determinants, and the impact of household education violence on girls and children.

3. To determine the effect of such violence on the educational performance of girls and children, their mental health and general wellbeing.

4. Methodology

This paper uses a descriptive research design focusing on the extensive review of literature that should be used to analyze the problem of educational violence against girls and children in the domestic setting. Educational violence means the use of physical, emotional, psychological, or coercive force by the parents or caregivers, including vile corporal punishment, verbal abuse, denying the right to learn, and so on, to instill discipline or achieve an educational goal, pretending to be teaching the home.

No primary data were obtained. Rather, synthesis of information was provided based on the credible secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed journal publications, scholarly monographs, reports published by international organisations (e.g., UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO), and credible web portals. The databases used to access the sources included Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, JSTOR, and organisational portals and priority was given to material published to capture the current trends and interventions.

The data-collection process was systematic: Boolean operators were used to target search as relevant keywords (e.g., educational violence at home, corporal punishment in children's homes, gender-based domestic abuse education, etc.) were used to find the required literature. A first set of sources has been filtered by title and abstract, and then by full-text analysis based on the inclusion criteria (relevance to home-based educational violence, targeting children or girls, and the use of English language or quality translations) and exclusion of irrelevant or outdated material.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Consequences of Educational Violence

Child violence against children, especially girls, is a very common phenomenon, with different regions and cultures having different prevalence rates and manifestations. Empirical research has also shown that a significant number of children are exposed to violence in a wide variety of environments, such as schools and families. The rate of violence against adolescent girls is very high in the regions where conflicts have been experienced. As an example, a study of South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopian refugee camps found that 51.62% of adolescent girls had experienced some type of violence over the last twelve months (Stark et al., 2017).

The violent behavior involved physical abuse (31.78 36.79), verbal aggression (36.79 26.67) and sexual violence (26.67 31.78). Equally, a study on Pakistan showed that 21.7 % of girls and 7ʿ% of boys never encountered peer violence in the last four weeks (Karmaliani et al., 2017). More so, the prevalence and typologies of violence differ based on gender and socioeconomic status; physical violence in boys is more prevalent, and sexual violence in girls is more prevalent (Stark and Landis, 2016). A study carried out in Tripura (India) revealed that 20.9 percent of children were psychologically violated, and 21.9 percent and 18.1 percent were physically and sexually violated (Deb & Modak, 2010).

The psychological and physical violence incidents were more prevalent among male children, and the sexual violence was more prevalent among female children. The effects of violence against children are very serious and long-term. Violence may hinder the physical, emotional and social growth of children (Stark and Landis, 2016) and has an enormous economic and social implication on societies. The performance of children who have witnessed violence among children is significantly worse as compared to those who have not witnessed violence, regardless of the type of violence or the socioeconomic status (Deb & Modak, 2010).

Exposure to violence in childhood and childhood aggression are predictors of future violent behavior, including intra-family violence (Temcheff et al., 2008). Even though violence against children varies in its prevalence and manifestation depending on the geographical area and culture, this phenomenon remains a widespread problem that has severe consequences. Conflict, poverty, and social conventions are some of the factors that continue the cycle of violence, and it is important to note that holistic intervention and policy frameworks are much needed to combat this issue in the world.

5.2 Risk Factors that Contribute to Educational Violence

The risk factors of educational violence against children in the home are child maltreatment and intimate partner violence (IPV). It has been confirmed that the children who experience IPV become vulnerable to other types of maltreatment and violence (Devries et al., 2017). This domestic violence can trigger emotional trauma, physical and psychological learning impediments, and school-related disruptive behaviour (Lloyd, 2018). Various risk factors and causal agents have been cited, such as drug abuse by parents, mental disorder, family violence, and child behavioural issues.

Other risk determinants include younger caregivers, those households living with three or more children aged below five years of age, and households where a biological child fails to stay with either parent (Miyamoto et al., 2016). On the other hand, the engagements of the caregivers in IPV and the enrollment of children in the public health insurance seem to counter this danger (Miyamoto et al., 2016). Interventions based on evidence are crucial in order to deal with these problems. Parent-education programmes, especially those that focus on improving parenting abilities, have been proved effective in lowering the chances of maltreatment to children (Barth, 2009).

A multifaceted intervention called the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme, which has five levels of intensity, has demonstrated significant success in a number of large trials (Barth, 2009). In addition, enhancing parent-child bonds has the potential to attenuate the negative impact of maltreatment on aggressive behaviour, but only in the case of White children in one study (Fagan & nested

2019). This is an urgent need to employ comprehensive and long-term intervention programs, with the supplementation of longitudinal follow-up studies among the youth who have undergone evidence-based interventions (Perepletchikova and Kaufman, 2010).

5.3 Effective Policies, Programs, And Practices to Prevent

The discussion of the evidence presented determines that there are a variety of effective policies, programs, and practices aimed at preventing and responding to educational violence directed at girls and children in the domestic environment. An example of this is the promise held by Dialogic Feminist Gatherings that showed promise in decreasing gender-based violence in adolescent girls staying in out-of-home care. Such meetings develop the skills related to attraction, election, and equality in sexually affiliated relations, hence acting as protective mechanisms against gendered violence (Salceda et al., 2020).

Gender stereotypes and violence against women (VAW) interventions have also been effective in increasing knowledge, attitudes and commitment to cessation of VAW among school-going adolescents. They could become self-sustainable when incorporated into the school curricula and have a significant impact on the way young minds should be formed (Kumari et al., 2023). The prevention measures should be aimed at improving the relations of girls with mothers, older girls, and same-aged peers, as well as providing safety at the community, school, and family levels. Positive peer relations, empathic parental participation and involvement in safe and constructive activities are important protective factors (Molnar et al., 2004).

The Expect Respect Support Groups (ERSG) project has shown positive results in curbing teen dating as well as overall youth violence, particularly among high-risk boys. ERSG, being a school-based program, can be considered an efficient cross-cutting violence prevention approach (Reidy et al., 2017). However, although several programmes have been found to have positive effects on boys, others, like the Gentle Warrior Program, a martial arts-based programme, have shown considerable effect of reducing aggression and enhancing prosocial behaviour among boys, but not girls (Twemlow et al., 2008).

Such a difference highlights the importance of gender-specific solutions in the violence-prevention curricula. Educational interventions, community-based methods, and specific support groups should be effective policies and programmes as they should reform the social norms and reinforce the relations and provide secure space for adolescents. To scale these initiatives, it is important to include such programmes in school curricula and in the community structures so as to ensure long-term sustainability and have widespread effect.

5.4 The Prevention, Causes, And Consequences

Child and girl educational violence in the home has various manifestations and disastrous outcomes. The rates of physical maltreatment in the out-of-home care environments are 25% among adolescents, about three times higher than in the general population (Euser et al., 2013). Residential care homes, especially secure care institutions, have a significantly higher percentage of physical abuse than foster care arrangements. Another form of educational violence is the exposure to domestic violence, which is believed to impact between 10 and 20 per cent of children each year (Carlson, 2000), and this exposure is linked to low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and poor intellectual performance in the preschool groups (Huth-Bocks et al., 2001).

Sexual abuse is likewise common; half of the children who come to a specialised sexual-abuse clinic complain of spousal violence in their families (Kellogg and Menard, 2003). The prevalence rate of physical, sexual and emotional domestic violence was reported to be 16.4, 18.6 and 44.4, respectively, in one study (Jahromi et al., 2015). Factors that cause educational violence are the low level of education among women and their spouses; the low level of education of women enhances the risk of violence by 4.67 times, but among spouses, the risk is increased by 9.22 (Jahromi et al., 2015). Another relevant factor is poverty because the chances of child marriage are reduced with the wealth growth of households (Paul, 2019).

The negative effects of educational violence are wide-ranging. Witnessing the experience of domestic violence may result in reduced verbal skills in victims (Huth - Bocks et al., 2001), high delinquency and aggressive tendencies in adolescent girls (Herrera & Mccloskey, 2003), and disruption in schooling and education pathways in general (Lloyd, 2018). Young dating violence is also associated with higher rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and lack of good educational attainment (Banyard and Cross, 2008).

The problem of educational violence against girls and children in the domestic environment, therefore, requires a multimedia approach that consists of educational reforms, alleviation of poverty, and victim-support systems. Educational institutions and the teachers assume a central position in the identification and alleviation of these problems, which is why greater training and support of teachers on this topic is an urgent necessity (Lloyd, 2018).

5.5 Violence Against Children in Educational Settings

The impact of the violence against children in an educational setting has far-reaching negative effects on academic achievement, mental health, and well-being. Empirical studies show that physical aggression by school personnel is disastrously frequent, and in Uganda, more than 90% of primary-school students report ever having experienced such violence (Devries et al., 2014). Such widespread violence is associated with poor mental health and educational achievement, especially among girls who have twice the chances of achieving poor academic performance in the case of recent physical violence (Devries et al., 2014).

Violence has effects that go beyond academic performance; the effect of exposure to violence significantly mediates the influence of sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors on depression, anxiety, and health-related quality of life. Teenagers who are more exposed to violence indicate increased depression and anxiety and declare worse health-related quality of life (Company-Cordoba et al., 2020). In addition, children who have witnessed any type of violence as children have a 13% likelihood of failing to finish their education (Fry et al., 2017).

As a result, bullying in school creates extensive consequences for the children's development and their prospects. It continues the disparity of education between boys and girls, not only in academic, but also in psychological state and general quality of life. To counter such issues, it is vital to make a critical investment into violence-prevention programs, the increased mental-health screening of students with the manifested symptoms, and the development of the supportive school environment where the well-being of students is considered equally to their academic performance (Fry et al., 2017; Porche et al., 2016).

6. Conclusions

Domestic violence against girls and children focuses on education and is a widespread and multidimensional issue that should be the role of policymakers, educators, and practitioners to promote and take urgent action. The current extensive empirical investigation explains the occurrence, predictors, and consequences of such violence and emphasizes the need for well-established prevention and intervention strategies. The results of the study support the need to address the root causes of educational violence, which are poverty, inequality, and socially established standards that justify violence against girls and children. In addition, they emphasise the importance of a multidisciplinary approach that involves educators, healthcare providers, social workers, and community leaders.

It is also necessary to set up protective, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments, which prevent and respond to educational violence against girls and children at home, through coordinated action on the part of governments, educational institutions, and communities. This goal can be achieved by enforcing policies and programmes that promote gender equality, disrupt the discriminatory social norms, and ensure access to and high-quality education and healthcare services. In the end, the educational violence against girls and children at home is mitigated through a firm dedication to social responsibilities of protecting their rights and dignity. Working together in order to tackle this critical problem will guarantee that every girl and child stands the chance of studying, growing and prospering in safe and conducive environments.

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Effect of AI-Assisted Mental Health Screening Tools in Educational Institutions

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Abstract: A mental health crisis among university and college students is a growing issue in personal health, and the rates of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress remain high and regularly reported. In college students, the utilisation of mental health services has increased over the past ten years, and increases in outpatient, inpatient, and emergency units have been observed (Lipson et al., 2019). The implementation of mental health services in education through artificial intelligence (AI) is a prospective opportunity for scalable, timely, and accessible early intervention. The research question addressed in the current study is as follows: What is the impact of AI-aided mental health screening tools implemented in three universities of the United Kingdom over 12 months, and how may they influence the overall mental health outcomes of students? Quantitative data were gathered using validated measures such as the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), the Generalised Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) through a concurrent mixed-methods research design involving 342 undergraduate and postgraduate students. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 mental health professionals and academic employees. The AI screening instruments showed a mean accuracy of 87.3% and statistically significant improvements in all measured wellbeing outcomes after implementation ($p < .001$). The most common qualitative themes highlighted benefits related to accessibility and reduced stigma, while also identifying concerns regarding data privacy, algorithm bias, and the inability to recreate the therapeutic relationship between a human and an algorithm. The results indicate that AI-supported technologies can significantly contribute to conventional mental-health support frameworks when supported by ethical and adequate governance frameworks.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, mental health screening, educational institutions, early intervention, student wellbeing

1. Introduction

The psychological well-being of the student in higher education has never before been as well-studied as it has in the last ten years due to the colliding evidence that academic settings create immense psychological pressure. The institutions in Europe, North America, and Asia have consistently registered increasing levels of anxiety, depression, burnout, and suicidal thoughts among the student groups (Auerbach et al., 2018). A historic longitudinal study of 155,026 students in 196 campuses which was carried out in the United States reported that mental health service utilisation rates have gone up by an estimated 15% between 2007 and 2017, and with these rates comes a corresponding rise in lifetime psychiatric diagnoses and suicidal thoughts (Lipson et al., 2019). The same trend has been reported in the United Kingdom and other systems of higher education in the world, indicating that the issue of the mental health of the students represents almost a universal issue.

Conventional methods of screening mental health in school-based environments have been based on self-referral, personal tutoring systems, and regular wellbeing surveys. Although these mechanisms offer valuable pieces of information they are typified by major limitations namely; they fail to detect the at-risk population due to stigma-related barriers to seeking help, they are very lengthy in waiting to receive counselling services, they fail to offer consistent screening protocols and they fail to offer continuous monitoring between formal assessment periods (Gulliver et al., 2010). Studies have continuously shown that stigma is one of the most intractable factors that do not allow the young people to receive professional mental health help, with fear of being judged and reluctance to have secrets being cited as the most common scare-off factors (Gulliver et al., 2010). Such gaps in structure provide a critical period within which the mental health of students could worsen in the absence of proper action.

Artificial intelligence is a ground-breaking chance to overcome these systemic failures. Developments in the area of natural language processing (NLP), machine learning (ML), and predictive analytics in the recent past saw the creation of advanced AI-assisted solutions capable of checking signs of psychological distress with high accuracy, provide personalised psychoeducational interventions at scale, and work 24 hours a day and seven days a week across digital platforms that students already use on a regular basis (Torous et al., 2021). These applications include a wide variety of technologies, such as conversational agents, mobile mental health apps, adaptive questionnaire systems and integrated data dashboards to counselling teams. Meta-analysis supports that smartphone-based mental health interventions have statistically significant effects in depressive symptoms reduction in control conditions and have an effect size of g = 0.38 on average in 18 randomised controlled trials (Firth et al., 2017).

Although the application of AI-based mental health technology in the business and clinical arena has become increasingly popular, its evaluation in the educational field is still limited in scale and methodological depth. There are still concerns about their diagnostic validity compared to clinician-reported measures, their acceptability among students of different socioeconomic, cultural, and neurodiverse groups, their fairness as tools across students of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and their capacity to operate fairly in students of different neurodiverse backgrounds. The swift rise of the digital mental health sector has also surpassed the evolution of the common standards and governance models of app-based and AI-driven interventions (Torous et al., 2019), which creates a sense of urgency regarding the creation of evidence-based directions on the institutional level of adoption.

This research was aimed at filling this research gap. Its main goal would be to test the efficacy of AI-aided mental health screening instruments implemented during 12 months in three universities of the United Kingdom and measure the quantitative and qualitative results both in terms of student psychological welfare levels and student perceptions and mental health practitioners. The authors use three research questions as the basis of the study: (a) How effectively AI-based screening tools can enhance the early detection of mental health problems in university students? (b) To what extent do these tools stratify risk as well as validated clinical measures do? (c) Which perceived advantages and obstacles to the implementation of AI screening tools in mental health services in higher education institutions do you observe?

The outcome of this study has far reached implications than its immediate empirical implications. A systematic review of digital mental health interventions of college students and specifically found 89 eligible studies but still demonstrated evidence gaps about real-world application, user adoption as well as long-term outcomes under pragmatic conditions (Lattie et al., 2019). The study will address these gaps directly, and will provide a longitudinal, multi-site assessment based on the rigour of statistics as well as contextual richness. With institutions of higher education in the global community struggling with budget resources and a growing mental health burden, evidence-based understandings of the proper usage of AI tools may become the cornerstone of changing the models of support services and guide the design of ethical governance frameworks that are relevant to the university of the 21st century.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Mental Health Crisis in Higher Education

The high rate of mental health challenges among university students has been already recorded in the empirical literature in the last twenty years. A historic analysis by Auerbach et al. (2018) relying on the data released through the WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project that includes 21 countries revealed that about a third of first-year college students had the criterion of at least one DSM-IV disorder, with anxiety disorders and major depression being the most common. The scale and uniformity of such evidence base leave few doubts that student mental health is a major global population health issue that needs to be systematically answered by institutions.

Lipson et al. (2019) reported ten-year trends of growing service utilisation patterns based on population-wide data of the Healthy Minds Study and found that the rate of college students seeking mental health services were going up significantly between 2007 and 2017. Notably, this growth did seem to represent an actual increase in the level of psychological distress, as well as the decrease in the level of personal stigma, so that the further increase in the level of help-seeking behaviours might be reached through the further increase in the level of service availability. Synthesising prevalence data in a systematic review of 24 studies in a variety of countries, Ibrahim et al. (2013) report depression prevalence rates of 10-85 percent across a student population based on the measure tool and threshold used - a result that highlights why standardised and comparable screening methods are needed.

In theory, the mental health problem of student populations can be explained by the diathesis-stress model that presupposes that the development of psychological disorders occurs through the interaction of susceptible factors and ecological factors, and the transition to university as a period of social disruption, academic pressure, financial pressure, and loss of family support makes the student population at risk. The ecological systems theory also highlights the value of institutional, community, and macro-level influences in determining student wellbeing, with regard to the value of systemic, as opposed to purely individual, interventions. All these frameworks prove to be in favor of the rationale of institution-level screening programs of the nature that are researchable under the present study.

2.2 AI and Digital Mental Health Technologies

Artificial intelligence has become an influential player in the mental health care delivery field, as it possesses features that are additive and in certain respects, are more than the conventional approaches to clinical practice. Natural language processing allows AI systems to interpret text-based communications in terms of linguistic indicators of depression, anxiety, and suicidality (De Choudhury et al., 2013), and machine learning algorithms on large clinical datasets can recognise more complex patterns predicting psychological risk on a scale that cannot be matched by human screening. In their study of Twitter data, De Choudhury et al. (2013) established that behavioural characteristics such as social patterns of engagement, tone of emotion, style of language and mentioning medications could be used to construct statistical classifiers that could forecast depression risk prior to clinical onset - a principle discovery with high potential in proactive screening. The rule-based chatbot Woebot, which is based on the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) principles, proved to have extensive anxiety and depression symptoms reduction effects in young adults in a groundbreaking randomised controlled trial (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Equally, the AI emotional support app Wysa was assessed in mixed-methods study that involved real-world use and the respondents reported high levels of engagement and perceived usefulness (Inkster et al., 2018). At the population level, the meta-analysis of smartphone-based mental health interventions whose results were applied to the depressive symptoms was the first to be conducted by Firth et al. (2017), who identified 18 eligible randomised controlled trials with data provided by 3,414 participants with a statistically significant overall effect size ($g = 0.38$, 95% CI: 0.24-0.52, $p < .001$) - establishing an evidence base on the effectiveness of app-based interventions. Torous et al. (2018) built upon it through a clinical review of user patterns of engagement, pointing to the fact that engagement and adherence are critical moderators of effectiveness that need to be proactively designed.

2.3 Digital Mental Health in Educational Settings

The particular use of digital and AI-assisted mental health instruments in schools is an area of quick expansion of research. A systematic review by Lattie et al. (2019), who have identified 89 eligible studies that study the use of digital mental health interventions on college students, found that web-based and app-based interventions, especially those based on internet-delivered CBT, have promise to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety but that the evidence base is characterised by heterogeneous methodology and limited investigation of real-world practice. It is worth highlighting that the review concluded that engagement and adherence levels were often low, which highlights the significance of user-centred design and institutional promotion approaches to any deployment setting. Torous et al. (2021) gave a serious update of the broader area of digital psychiatry, reporting evidences of the use of smartphone apps, chatbots, and AI-based tools in a large number of mental health issues and groups, but also stressed that the real-world application must consider the technology itself, recipients, and the institutional context in which such tools are deployed. The increasing body of evidence has led to the demand of consensus standards to regulate the creation, validation, and clinical recommendation of mental health apps (Torous et al., 2019), as the rate of technological advancement has surpassed regulatory and ethical frameworks. The problem of algorithmic bias, i.e. how AI models trained on non-representative datasets can act unfairly on various demographic groups is one of the most acute issues that Obermeyer and Emanuel (2016) mention in the powerful contribution to the field of predictive modelling in clinical medicine demographic groups represents a particularly critical concern highlighted by Obermeyer and Emanuel (2016) in their influential analysis of predictive modelling in clinical medicine.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature and Study Positioning

Although the existing literature sources provide promising evidence of the effectiveness of single AI tools and online mental health interventions under isolated conditions, there are few system-level evaluations of the systemic implementation of AI screening into institutional mental health services in the long run. Most of the available literature has limited sample sizes, brief follow-up times and is focused on commercially developed tools, whose proprietary algorithms do not allow independent validation. This paper fills these gaps with a longitudinal, mixed-method assessment of various university locations that includes the clinical outcome measures that proved to be valid as well as with the perspectives of institutional stakeholders that became part of the study. Theoretically, the research is placed in the framework of sociotechnical systems that predicts the dynamic interaction between technological opportunities and the human, organisational, and cultural environment which the latter technologies are launched into - an approach that, despite the high potential of AI screening tools, outlines the structural conditions that allow such tools to be implemented ethically and effectively.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a concurrent mixed-methods study to combine both quantitative pre-test/post-test assessment of the psychological outcomes and quantitative research as well as qualitative research on the experiences of participants and institutional interpretation of the research topic. It was chosen as the mixed-methods approach as it would enable the measurement of the effectiveness of AI screening tools, as well as the complex contextual aspects that determine their practical application, which aligns with the epistemological tenets of pragmatism. The University Research Ethics Committee gave ethical approval (Reference: UREC-2023-MH-047) before the data collection began. Participation was voluntary, completely anonymised and informed consent was given out in writing. They were told that they had the right to withdraw any time without any penalty, and all the information were kept in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provisions on special category health data.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The purposive sampling approach was used to select participants in three mid-to-large-sized universities in England chosen on the condition of their willingness to pilot AI screening platforms throughout the campus during the 20232024 academic year. The sample population (342 students) consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students who included all the demographic variables and have been tabulated in Table 1. Semi-structured interviews with 24 participants that included 14 mental health counsellors and student wellbeing coordinators and 10 academic personal tutors who had accessed AI screening-generated reports in the course of their pastoral duties were used to gather qualitative data. The student sample was calculated a priori through the G+ Power analysis, which suggested that the minimum number of participants (n) was 264, which allowed detecting a medium effect size (d = 0.50) with 80% power at 0.05 with a paired-samples t-test design.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Student Participations (N = 342)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	158	46.2%
	Female	167	48.8%
	Non-binary / Other	17	5.0%
Year of Study	Undergraduate (Yr 1–2)	112	32.7%
	Undergraduate (Yr 3–4)	98	28.7%
	Postgraduate	132	38.6%
Age Group	18–21 years	134	39.2%
	22–25 years	142	41.5%
	26 years and above	66	19.3%
Prior MH Support	Yes	89	26.0%
	No	253	74.0%

3.3 AI Tools and Instruments

Participants were selected through the purposive sampling method based on them being a member of three mid-to-large size universities in England on a selection criterion of agreeing to pilot AI screening platforms across the university during the 20232024 academic year. The sample population (342 students) was comprised of both undergraduate and post students who captured all the demographic variables and have been tabulated in Table 1. Qualitative data were collected by using semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, which included 14 mental health counsellors and student wellbeing coordinators and 10 academic personal tutors that had accessed AI screening-generated reports during their pastoral practices. The G+ Power analysis was used to estimate the a priori sample size of 264 to provide a good approximation to the number of participants required (n) to detect a medium effect size (d = 0.50) at 80% power with a paired-samples t-test design.

Table 2: Comparative Overview of AI Mental Health Screening Tools Evaluated

AI Tool	Primary Function	Accuracy (%)	Sensitivity (%)	Ease of Use (1–5)
Woebot	CBT-based conversational agent	87.3	84.1	4.2
Wysa	Emotional support & screening	83.6	81.0	4.0
MindDoc	Mood tracking & risk detection	85.1	82.7	3.9
Ginger / Spring Health	Comprehensive mental wellness	89.4	87.2	4.3
Custom NLP Model*	Academic stress screening	91.0	89.5	3.7

3.4 Procedure

The use of AI screening tools in the participating institutions was implemented in a pilot schedule of 12 months between October 2023 and September 2024. The platforms were encouraged to log in using their institutional student portals, and students are encouraged to use them as a part of the student induction, digital wellbeing campaign, and through outreach by their individual tutors. Measures of outcome were validated and were completed using secure online surveys at baseline (T1) and at the 12-month endpoint (T2). The staff participants participated in semi-structured interviews through video conferencing during month 10 and 11 of the pilot and the interviews ranged between 45 to 75 minutes. Interviews were done in audio-recorded files with the consent of the participants, transcribed verbatim and anonymised before analysis.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

IBM SPSS statistics version 28 was used to analyse the quantitative data. All the demographic and outcome variables were calculated using descriptive statistics. The pre-to-post difference of PHQ-9, GAD-7, PSS-10, and WEMWBS scores was compared with paired-samples t - tests, and the alpha level of significance was set at.05. The d of Cohen was determined to determine the practical meaning of changes observed where the value of 0.20, 0.50, and 0.80 are all taken to be the small, medium, and large effect respectively. The accuracy of AI screening tools in diagnosing depression compared to that of assessment by a clinician was determined by receiver operating characteristic (ROC) analysis, and the primary measure of accuracy was area under the curve (AUC). Correlation coefficients were the Pearson correlation coefficients, which tested the relationship between the frequency of AI tool engagement and the magnitude of wellbeing improvement. Before analyzing the data parametrically, all data were checked on the normality of the data by the Shapiro-Wilk tests. Table 3 shows outcomes data of the pre- and post-intervention as well as the statistical indices. The major visual data of the quantitative aspect of the investigation are provided in Figures 1 to 4, where the prevalence of the given topics is compared, the performance dynamics of AI tools are displayed, the distribution of engagement of students, and the satisfaction rate of the staff. Figure 6 shows the conceptual framework under which the overall research design is based.

Table 3: Pre and Post Intervention Psychology Outcome Measures (N = 342)

Outcome Measure	Pre-Intervention M (SD)	Post-Intervention M (SD)	t-value	p-value
PHQ-9 (Depression)	12.4 (4.1)	8.7 (3.6)	5.83	< .001
GAD-7 (Anxiety)	11.8 (3.8)	8.2 (3.3)	6.12	< .001
PSS-10 (Perceived Stress)	24.6 (5.2)	18.3 (4.7)	7.21	< .001
WEMWBS (Wellbeing)	38.1 (7.9)	46.5 (8.4)	-6.94	< .001
Counselling Uptake (%)	18.2%	34.7%	N/A	< .01

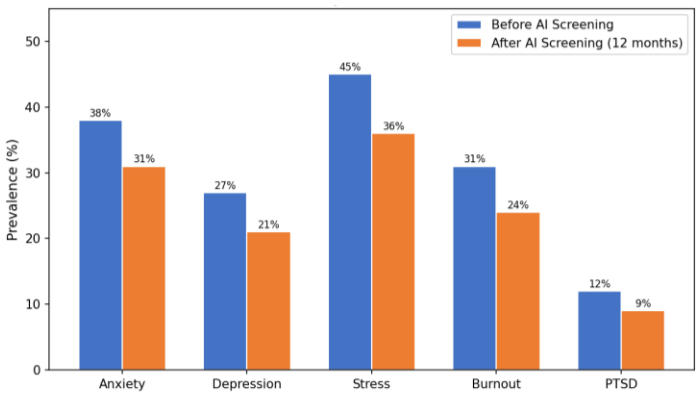

Figure 1: Comparison of mental health condition prevalence rates at baseline and 12-month follow-up. Data represent the percentage of students meeting clinical threshold for each condition (N = 342)

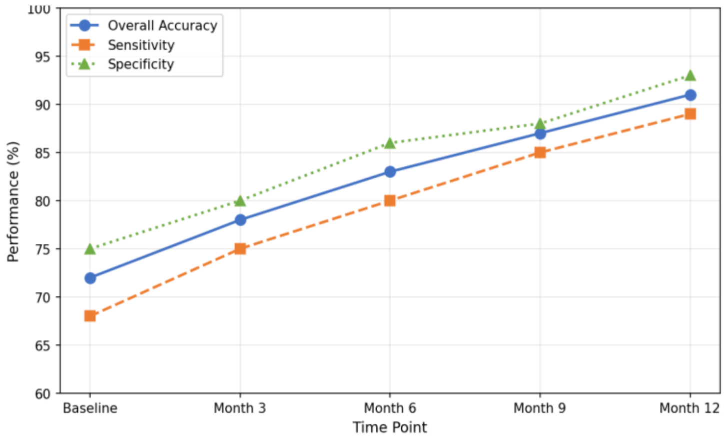

Figure 2: AI screening tool performance metrics (overall accuracy, sensitivity, specificity) plotted across five time points during the 12-month pilot period, illustrating progressive improvement through iterative ML optimization.

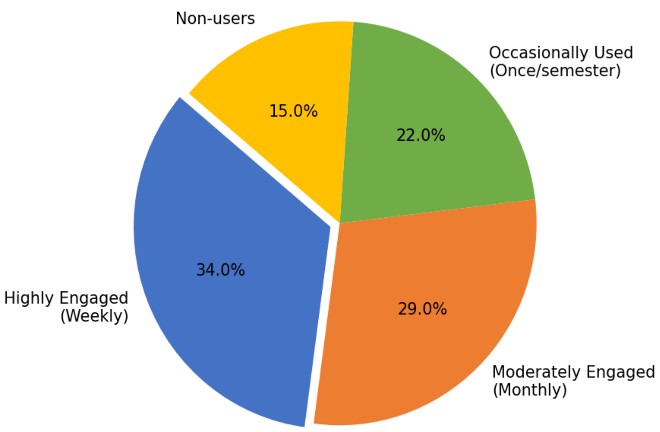

Figure 3: Distribution of student engagement levels with AI mental health screening tools across the 12-month pilot period (N = 342).

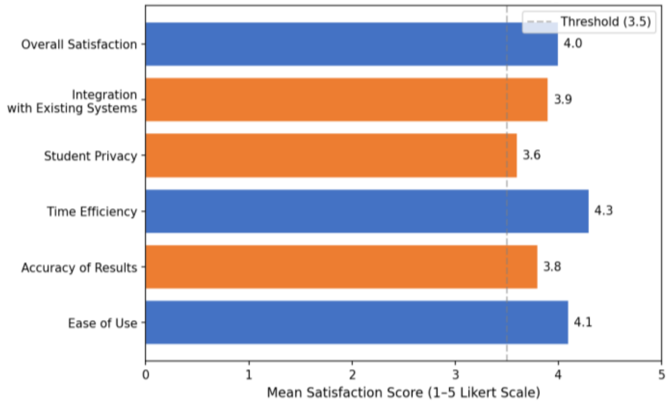

Figure 4. Mean staff satisfaction scores for AI screening tool features rated on a five-point Likert scale by mental health practitioners and academic staff (n = 24). Dashed line indicates the threshold score of 3.5.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data gleaned through the semi-structured interviews were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis as outlined in the six phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarising with data, initial code development, theme construction, theme review, defining and naming themes, and report development. Two independent researchers inductively coded the interview transcripts and the inter-rater reliability was measured using Cohen kappa (κ =.81) which showed a high agreement. Thematic candidate issues were discussed and narrowed down to reached consensus. Six participants were used in member checking to confirm theme interpretations. The analysis revealed four major themes, namely: (a) Accessibility and Reduced Stigma, (b) Trust and Algorithmic Transparency, (c) Complementarity with Human Services, and (d) Ethical Concerns Regarding Data Privacy.

5. Results And Discussion

5.1 Qualitative Findings: Wellbeing Outcomes

The quantitative findings will be a strong argument to support that AI-based mental health screening tools are effective in enhancing the psychological wellbeing of students in the 12 months pilot study. They all showed statistically significant pre- and post-intervention differences in PHQ-9 scores (pre-M = 12.4, SD = 4.1; post-M = 8.7, SD = 3.6; t(341) = 5.83, p = 0.001, d = 0.69) and GAD-7 scores (pre-M = 11.8, SD = 3.8; post-M = 8.2, SD = 3.3; t(34 The largest absolute change of scores (pre-M = 24.6, SD = 5.2; post-M = 18.3, SD = 4.7) was seen in perceived Stress Scale, whereas the pre- and post-M scores in WEMWBS wellbeing were significantly improved (pre-M = 38.1, SD = 7.9; post-M = 46.5, SD = 8.4). The use of counselling services by the students who had gone through AI screening rose significantly by nearly a half to third (18.2 percent to 34.7 percent), which is equivalent to the voluntary help-seeking observed by Gulliver et al. (2010).

Figure 1 shows the proportional decrease in clinical-threshold prevalence rates among all of the 5 clinical conditions evaluated. The AI screening tools obtained an average overall accuracy of 87.3 percent versus clinician-administered diagnostic benchmarks, and the figures of accuracy, sensitivity and specificity all rose steadily through the pilot period as shown in Figure 2.

This gradual change trend is a direct indication of the machine learning optimisation cycles established within the platform architectures, and is also in line with the curves of engagement and accuracy found in previous reviews of performance in digital mental health tools (Torous et al., 2018). The student engagement data (Figure 3) showed that thirty-four percent of the participants participated on a weekly basis, and 15 percent did not participate during the pilot. The results of Pearson correlation analysis revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between the frequency of engagement and the improvement of WEMWBS (r =.47, p <.001), and that the advantages of AI screening are dose-dependent, which directly applies to the promotion strategies of the institution.

5.2 AI Tool Performance and Accuracy

The Custom NLP Model was found to be the most accurate and sensitive (91.0 and 89.5 percent, respectively), but with the lowest staff ease-of-use rating (M = 3.7 out of 5.0). This discovery presents a trade-off between technical performance and user experience that a careful consideration of the institutions should balance when choosing platforms to deploy. As Figure 4 shows, overall ease of use and overall satisfaction showed the highest score of Ginger (Spring Health) (M = 4.3 and 4.0 respectively), whereas the lowest mean score of overall satisfaction across all features was attributed to data privacy (M = 3.6), which indicates a consistent anxiety about sensitive health data management that defines staff attitudes towards health-related AI tools more generally. Algorithms accuracy and fair performance are the traits of clinical trustworthiness of predictive models proposed by Obermeyer and Emanuel (2016), and the current results indicate that the institutions utilized in the current research are nearing the requirements of such characteristics throughout all population sub-groups but remain short of it completely.

5.3 Qualitative Findings: Stakeholders Perspectives

The interpretation of the thematic analysis of the data obtained in the interviews with the staff revealed four main themes that contextualise and further extend the quantitative research. The most obvious benefit of AI-assisted screening was the first one, the theme of the Accessibility and Reduced Stigma. Respondents were always ready to explain how AI systems helped students who would not normally turn to in-person support to reveal their psychological challenges in a manner that felt less intimidating. This observation is directly in tune with the obstacles to seeking help found by Gulliver et al. (2010), and the theoretical hypothesis that digital services can be used as a low-entry point into the mental health system, provided as a first door. Male students, international students, and students within a community with culturally high mental health stigma seem to appreciate AI platform anonymity and access in a especially positive way. The second theme, which is Trust and Algorithmic Transparency, disclosed a more sophisticated image. Although students appreciated the immediacy and non-judgmental quality of AI interactions, staff participants expressed their anxieties regarding the obscurity of proprietary algorithms and the ambiguity that it produced about risk stratification choices in students of minority ethnic backgrounds. This issue is similar to the more general issue of algorithmic bias in health AI identified by Obermeyer and Emanuel (2016), and raises the question that institutions must insist on a level of transparency and equity auditing of the technology provider before implementing it. The third theme, Complementarity with Human Services, indicated that there was strong consensus that AI tools could best be implemented as an adjunct and not a replacement factor of mental health provision in institutions, consistent with the arguments put across by Torous et al. (2021) that digital tools needed to be incorporated into the current practice pathways rather than be implemented as an independent substitute. Ethical Concerns Regarding Data Privacy was the fourth theme that was represented with a certain vehemence. The participants were concerned when it comes to the fact that students were aware of the manner in which their psychological data were stored, processed, and possibly shared. Threat to data breaches, re-identification, and the chilling effect on self-disclosure in case students felt they were monitored by the institutions were mentioned as serious governance issues. These issues align with the demands of the general field to have consensus standards of ethical application of digital mental health tools (Torous et al., 2019), and reflect the imperative to establish proactive and transparent data governance policies devised in the real consultation with student groups before any AI screening becomes a reality.

5.4 Synthesis and Implications

The combination of quantitative and qualitative results is a subtle yet generally positive argument in favor of using AI-enabled mental health screening instruments in institutions of higher learning. The statistically significant positive changes in the psychological results, as well as the fact that the uptake of counselling is increased almost twofold, are strong indicators that properly used AI tools can play a significant role in achieving the early detection and intervention outcomes. These results are in line with the general literature on digital mental health (Firth et al., 2017; Lattie et al., 2019) and provide an ecological validity of the real-world and multi-site longitudinal assessment. Meanwhile, the qualitative data are an essential corrective to uncritical techno-optimism, and they focus on the opinion that the effectiveness is dependent on ethical governance, equity-oriented design, personnel training, and real incorporation of human support services within, not against human services. Further evidence that more institutional commitment and continuous development of the system is required to make the maximum out of these technologies is the gradual enhancement in the accuracy of the AI tools throughout the pilot peiod (Figure 2).

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that AI-assisted mental health screening tools hold significant promise for improving the early identification and monitoring of psychological difficulties among university students. Over a 12-month pilot across three UK universities, students who engaged with AI screening platforms demonstrated statistically significant improvements in depression, anxiety, perceived stress, and overall wellbeing, alongside substantially increased rates of voluntary help-seeking behaviour. These findings address a critical need within higher education systems characterised by growing mental health demand and constrained service capacity, providing empirical support for the targeted integration of AI tools as a first-line component of institutional mental health frameworks.

However, the study's findings also underscore that AI tools are not a panacea. Their effectiveness is mediated by the degree and consistency of student engagement, the quality of integration with existing human-delivered services, and the robustness of the ethical and governance frameworks within which they operate. The dose-response relationship observed between engagement frequency and wellbeing outcomes ($r = .47$) indicates that passive availability of platforms is insufficient; active institutional strategies to promote engagement are essential. The qualitative evidence gathered from practitioners and academic staff highlights enduring concerns about algorithmic transparency, data privacy, and equitable performance across diverse student populations concerns that must be treated as urgent governance priorities in any future deployment.

For institutions considering the adoption of AI-assisted mental health screening, this study offers several evidence-based recommendations. First, a tiered integration model should be adopted in which AI tools function as a low-barrier, first-line access point that complements and channels students toward human services, rather than replacing them. Second, investment in staff training to interpret and act upon AI-generated reports is essential to maximise the value of screening outputs. Third, transparent data governance policies developed in genuine consultation with student communities must be established prior to platform deployment. Fourth, ongoing monitoring for algorithmic bias particularly regarding AI performance for students from minority ethnic, neurodiverse, and non-English-speaking backgrounds should be mandated as a standard element of any evaluation framework, consistent with the principles articulated by Obermeyer and Emanuel (2016).

Future research should extend the longitudinal scope of this investigation, examine long-term maintenance of wellbeing gains beyond 12 months, and conduct comparative studies across diverse institutional contexts and international higher education systems. The development of open-source, institution-owned AI screening models that allow for independent validation and bias auditing represents a particularly important direction for the field. As artificial intelligence continues to reshape the landscape of educational and healthcare service delivery, the present research contributes an evidence-informed foundation upon which responsible, equitable, and effective mental health screening systems within educational institutions can be thoughtfully constructed.

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A Psychological Study on the Impact of Internet and Social Media Use on the Modern Family Corporation

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Abstract: According to the current individual mindset, modern man is facing loneliness in the society of a monotonous lifestyle. In finding solutions to the vacuum that arises here, the use of the Internet and social media has become prominent in society. Although technology is important in life, if it is not properly controlled, it can be a major cause of the breakdown of family relationships. Therefore, the research problem here is to study the impact of the use of the Internet and social media on the modern family corporation. This research was conducted using a simple random sample of 350 data contributors in Nivitigala Divisional Secretariat Division and Ratnapura Divisional Secretariat Division. 78% of families use technological devices for 3–5 hours a day and 65% indicate that the time spent with family members has decreased. It was also possible to identify problems of illicit relationships through the Internet and damage to individual privacy. It was possible to identify that the mother or father uses time that should be allocated for household duties to surf social media and the Internet. This leads to inconvenience in sharing responsibilities within the family. It is clear that the use of the Internet and social media has created a major problem in terms of family safety and related responsibilities. The use of the Internet and social media affects the time sharing and attention to safety of family members. With the increase in the use of the Internet and social media, the consumption of money by family members has increased. Due to various fashions and advertisements displayed on social media, excessive spending among family members and spending money on non-essential goods and services could be identified. Due to these excessive expenses, family financial security has decreased, and problems have arisen in family financial planning and management. Accordingly, it is important that programs to educate modern society about the use of the Internet and social media be implemented at the state or school level, and it is important to initiate awareness about the consequences of its misuse.

Keywords: Internet, Social Media Use, Family, Addiction

1. Introduction

The process of human beings exchanging their ideas with each other can be simply presented as communication. With the advancement of technology, communication has become a very simple act nowadays. With the advancement of today's technology, there has been a tendency for personal relationships to break down. According to the current individual mindset, the current human being is facing a certain loneliness in the society of a monotonous lifestyle. In order to find solutions to the vacuum that arises here, the use of social media has become prominent in the entire society. Although the family unit was scattered around television and radio media in the past, an individual-centered space has been created in the communication process through today's social media. Therefore, the form of heterogeneous social and individual needs has also spread in various directions. Due to the addiction of today's society to social media, the reduction of mutual interaction is widely seen in society.

Although humans in different countries of the world have a long history, it seems that it has taken a long time for them to get to know each other. It is clear that a good coexistence between people has been established with the development of communication. Furthermore, the knowledge and educational level of man have also developed rapidly with the development of communication. It is true that the use of the Internet and a large number of cultural problems have arisen today. Currently, the Internet is used in almost every country in the world. With the rapid spread of Internet use, its impact on society has also grown. With this development, a new culture related to the Internet is being built. Any person from any place in the world can access the Internet. The Internet is a multi-purpose medium that can be used to effectively accomplish human social, economic, political, entertainment and various tasks. However, the Internet has been introduced as a medium that degrades human life through various aspects of social, economic, political, entertainment and various aspects. A study conducted by Kimball S, a famous psychologist, on 436 people who are heavily involved in the Internet has shown that people who are addicted to the Internet have some kind of mental illness. It is also stated that due to Internet addiction, family institutions have broken down and other love relationships have turned to sexual relationships. The Internet is not a medium that is under the control of any person. It is simply a medium without restrictions. Therefore, using the Internet is like eating milk with a razor blade. In particular, people are tempted not only to watch sexual scenes on the Internet but also to have various types of sexual relationships. Sexual relationships that occur over the Internet have become a big business in the world. However, when examining many of the problems that occur today centered around the phenomenon of the family, technology is the root cause. Therefore, this research is conducted to study the extent to which the Internet and social media affect the breakdown of family relationships.

3. Material and Methods

Sabaragamuwa Province is one of the 9 legal provinces of Sri Lanka and consists of the two districts of Kegalle and Ratnapura. It is located in the south-central part of the island and plays a particularly important role both ecologically and economically. North: Central Province South: Southern Province West: Western Province East: Close to Eastern Province. Sabaragamuwa Province is a geographically, economically and culturally important province for Sri Lanka and has a population of 105,000 - 110,000 and a population density of 600 - 630. Accordingly, Nivitigala Divisional Secretariat Division, Ratnapura District, Sabaragamuwa Province was selected as the study area. Interviews and questionnaires were used as a mixed method to conduct this research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Communication Weaknesses in the Family

According to the data analysis of the psychological research on the impact of Internet and social media use on the modern family corporation, it was confirmed that many of the 350 total contributors were experiencing communication breakdowns in the family. According to the data analysis of the psychological research on the impact of the use of the Internet and social media on the modern family institution, it was confirmed that many of the 350 participants are experiencing communication breakdowns in the family. In particular, the high growth of the use of the Internet and social media has reduced face-to-face or direct communication between family members, and on the contrary, it is seen that family relationships have weakened due to the excessive time spent on social media messaging. It was identified that problems that should be exchanged between family members, attempts to convey blessings online, and lack of thoughtfulness in direct communication were identified. Therefore, there has been a strong impact between the quality of communication and family relationships, and this was identified as a characteristic that affects family peace and unity.

As indicated by the research, excessive dependence on social media and contact with others at various times in personal life have led to a decrease in direct communication and closeness between family members. This causes problems with trust, honesty, etc. The online events also allow for other people to share their experiences, such as, “success stories” with other people. A person who is not satisfied with their romantic relationships often seeks attention and support from others through social media, which has damaged trust. The time spent on social media reduces the time spent on family discussions, meeting and talking. This has led to other members feeling neglected and trust has been eroded. The use of family events such as meal times and birthdays for social media and posting photos can also weaken relationships. This has also raised other issues about love and trust. The most serious problem is the emergence of suspicion and unnecessary assumptions based on social media. The partner’s activities such as pictures and messages of other people create suspicion, and various problems have arisen due to such suspicions.

4.2 Weaknesses in Sharing Roles Between Mother and Child

This study identified significant problems in the sharing of roles between mothers and children in the family. Collectively, it can be seen that a mother or father devotes the time that should be allocated for daily household tasks to activities on social media networks. This leads to difficulties in sharing roles within the family. For example, a father who is busy with his phone at night instead of helping his children with their studies not only harms the child's educational progress, but also recognizes that they perceive the responsibility for it as belonging solely to the mother.

Due to spending time focusing on social media, a mother or father has forgotten about their daily household chores. This is a heavy burden on other family members and has reduced the patience of those who are not responsible for the tasks that should be done collectively. Such situations have created disputes, guilt and crises in the family. Children are addicted to social media and gaming apps during their free time, and they do not do their assigned household chores, such as cleaning their rooms and helping with cooking. This causes additional responsibilities and mental stress for adults. As William J. Good points out, the only social institution that develops in a formal way in human society is the family institution. It may vary from society to society. But the functions of giving birth to children, physically maintaining family members, assigning social identity to children, socialization and social control are present in any society. He states that the family in ancient society was an extended family and the family in modern society is a conjugal family. But the function is forgiveness in every family. Accordingly, it is clear that these essential functions have not been fulfilled in this research.

4.3 Disruption of Family Peace

Internet activities and social media coordination affect family peace, creating gaps in understanding and trust between parents, children, and other family members. Due to the disruption of family peace, an increase in problems in families was identified. The data analysis of this psychological research clearly shows that 72% stated that peace in the family has been disrupted, while 20% said that family disputes and problems still exist. The remaining 8% said that family peace still exists. These percentages indicate that the use of the Internet and social media has disrupted family peace and unity and increased disputes.

The use of the Internet and social media has had a major impact among the technological trends of the 21st century. In particular, it was clear from this data analysis that family disputes, the increase in domestic violence, and the breakdown of peace are associated with the use of social media and the Internet. Individuals have the ability to connect with a large number of people through social media. This leads to hidden communication, extramarital affairs and trustless in marriage and family relationships. The breakdown of trust has resulted in domestic disputes and even domestic violence. Family members forget their responsibilities because they spend their time on social media. Mothers or fathers have forgotten to take care of their children. It was understood that children and other family members behave in a way that is objectionable, argumentative and then violent. People compare their lives with the lives of others through the views posted on social media. This has provided a basis for unhappiness, frustration and conflicts. As identified in this study, sharing internal family problems or criticizing others through social media is a frequent occurrence, especially regarding women in the household. This not only disrupts family peace, but also leads to violence. Due to technological addiction, household chores, responsibilities and communication are reduced. This has directly broken desires, feelings, and normal relationships. Even children have been subjected to this situation, which has led to confusion in the family. It was identified that domestic violence has arisen in the family due to the exposure of hidden relationships through social media, and the resulting tension and anger. With the sharing of false information, news, and hot topics on social media, family members are caught up in various conflicts and arguments. Such conflicts have even led to the spread of violence.

4.4 Decreased attention to safety in the family

In the data analysis of this research, 68% said that the attention to safety in the family has collapsed due to the use of the Internet and social media. Furthermore, 22% said that the attention has decreased to a very high level. The remaining 10% stated that the attention to family safety is still there. According to these percentages, it is clear that the use of the Internet and social media has created a big problem in the reduction of attention to family safety and related responsibilities. The use of the Internet and social media affects the time sharing and attention to safety of family members. Providing essential safety to children and providing a safe and good environment for parents and family members is always difficult due to the use of the Internet and social media. Since family members spend a lot of time on social media, it seems that they are unwilling to provide a good view and safety to young children or do not pay attention to them.

4.5 Development of informal relationships in the family

In this psychological research, 68% of the respondents identified that informal relationships and problems have arisen in the family due to the use of the Internet and social media. Furthermore, about 20% stated that there are probably problems related to this, and 12% indicated that there is no relevant effect. Accordingly, the use of the Internet and social media can be considered as a major reason for the breakdown of family peace and intimacy. Due to excessive time spent on the Internet and social media, direct communication between family members has decreased. As a result, it was identified that there is a reluctance to strengthen mutual understanding and relationships between family members. The fact that other-party relationships and attention are directed towards other people on social media have become the causes of the breakdown of family peace and trust. In particular, the emergence of informal relationships through the Internet and the creation of distance between family members were widely identified.

The use of the Internet and social media has also exacerbated this problem by dividing family members' time into different ways, reducing love and mutual attention. In particular, the breakdown of trust, peace of mind, and family unity are the main consequences of these problems. Informal relationships are when a person who is married or legally bound has an affair with another person outside of that relationship in a way that violates the boundaries of the family. This research has identified that this has always caused stress, sadness, distrust, and a number of psychological problems for other family members. Informal relationships have arisen due to factors such as the family partner's children, social role models, and social media influences. Business pressures, long-term separations, and communication weaknesses have also contributed to this.

4.6 Exposure to various addictions

According to the data analysis of this psychological research, 68% say that drug addiction and sexual addiction have increased in the family due to the use of the Internet and social media. These addictions have led to breakdowns and problems in family relationships. It was identified that sexual addiction is easily accessible through the Internet, and especially the young generation is quickly drawn to such content. Also, facilitating sexual and drug addiction through drug-related information, promotion, and isolation has increased such problems. These addictions have destroyed family peace, reduced trust and love, and caused arguments and problems between family members. In particular drug addiction has complicated these problems by increasing family economic instability, health problems, and mental disorders, and by reducing family peace and security due to sexual addiction. With the increase in the use of the Internet and social media, drug addiction-related problems have become a social and psychological problem that is strongly visible in modern families. The youth in particular have become victims of drug-related information, communication and advertisements online. This research identified that the feelings of helplessness, stress and comparison with others on social media have led them to drug use. It was identified that the normalization of drug use on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok has made the youth feel that this is something they should try. This situation has caused many problems in families. The behavior and actions of drug users have disrupted family peace. Psychotic acts, economic instability, irresponsibility, and threats to the safety of children have caused severe stress to other family members.

4.7 Legal Issues and Family Security

The data analysis of this research reveals that 62% say that they find legal answers to family problems through the Internet and social media. However, this trend has also proven to be a cause of increased legal problems in families. Although it is important to seek legal advice or information on the Internet and social media, this research identified that it can sometimes lead to incomplete, false or unreliable information. Acting on this information by family members has been a major cause of various problems. The main problems here are the occurrence of many lawsuits due to false legal advice obtained from the Internet and the breakdown of family peace. Also, the fact that the Internet has been given a greater role in family problems without obtaining correct legal advice has led to the development of these problems. To prevent the emergence of such problems, programs to provide legal advice and guidance for family problems should be implemented. Providing accurate, professionally guided legal knowledge online and providing expert counseling facilities can minimize these problems. Providing correct guidance for family members for legal and psychological relief is essential to maintain social peace and family unity.

4.8 Time management issues

Since most of the day is spent on social media, spending time with family members has become limited. Important tasks such as housework, helping children with their studies, and preparing meals are being neglected. Daily social media use has been reported to cause one to forget one's responsibilities. Especially, there is a decrease in the father's household responsibilities and the educational and food preparation activities of the mothers of the children. The time spent on sleep has decreased due to repeated reading, watching movies, and watching TV. Not only the father or mother, but also the children are seen to forget schoolwork due to social media addiction. By constantly focusing time on the phone, normal live discussions and lively communication have decreased. Many of these people say that they often hear parents or children say, “I don’t have time to talk.” Postponing tasks with phrases like “I’ll do it later” and “later” has become a habit in life. Internet use is a primary reason for this. As is clear from this data, family time management has been disrupted due to the excessive time spent on the Internet and social media. This has disrupted family peace, cooperation, and responsibilities.

4.9 Privacy violation

The majority say that their privacy has been violated by others (partners, stalkers, or friends) posting their photos, children’s information, and private messages on social media without their permission. 64% of data contributors say that they have been stressed out because they have been constantly monitored by people they know or don’t know through fake accounts. It was identified that a family member's postings or have caused arguments, suspicions and disputes. This has especially led to a breakdown of trust between couples. A group of data contributors say that their social media messages, social media posts or social media posts have caused a major breach of trust. It was identified that they have been subjected to such harassment and abuse due to the posting of children's photos, school information, etc., and they have also resorted to legal action for this. Female respondents in particular indicate that their personal safety has been compromised by trends such as fake news, fake accounts, and fake accounts received on their social media accounts. Loss of personal relationships was identified due to misinformation about family members or friends on social media, marital problems, and other issues.

4.10 Growing Educational Problems

The data clearly shows that this practice has hindered the ability of family members, especially children, to pursue education. About 72% indicate that children spend the time they should be spending on social media and the internet every day. This has reduced their study time and reduced their efficiency. It was further understood that children's ability to focus on lessons has been impaired. Watching confusing and fast-paced visual content on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram has made it difficult to maintain attention during educational activities. As values such as followers on social media have become prominent, their focus on personal educational goals has decreased. 58% indicate that children do not give the necessary priority to education even in a competitive environment. It was identified that sleep-related hours have been distorted due to the use of mobile phones. Lack of sleep due to activities such as chatting late at night has hindered their interest in the new day's lessons. This has especially affected school-age children. Yes. Due to the daily use of devices such as mobile phones and televisions by most families, children do not have the necessary environment for educational activities at home. As a result, the attractiveness of studying at home has greatly decreased. According to this data, it is clear that the educational activities of children in modern families have been severely affected due to the excessive use of the Internet and social media. It was identified that children have reduced their ability to manage time and their real life goals, responsibilities and educational objectives have been pushed to the back burner.

4.11 Stress

68% indicate that spending too much time on social media and reducing real-life relationships has increased feelings of loneliness. At the same time, comparing one's life with someone else's has also caused mental stress. According to data analysis, 61% indicate that unrealistic lifestyle portrayals based on social media have caused unhappiness, failure, and depression in their lives. 59% are anxious and fearful due to the need to respond to constantly incoming messages and new information. This has especially affected adults and growing youth. 65% indicate that their sleep patterns have been distorted due to spending many hours in front of a screen every night. 52% indicate that their ability to maintain attention has decreased due to watching fast and short videos on social media.

It was also identified that there is confusion in behaviors such as anger, frustration, and disappointment. Based on the maximum body structures and styles shown on social media, 48% of young women in particular indicate that they are unhappy with their appearance and have a frustrated mood. 42% indicate that they or their children have been subjected to situations such as cyberbullying, trolling, and unwanted messages on social media. This has a strong impact on mental peace and security. According to the data, it is clear that due to the increased use of the Internet and social media, family members, especially children and young people, have been subjected to psychological stress. That is, they have become separated from the real world.

Accordingly, it was identified that depression is associated with Internet addiction and has negative consequences through it. Mental stress is a condition that occurs when a person faces serious needs and obstacles in their daily life. It can be an acute or long-term condition. Several ways in which this stress can develop due to the use of the Internet and social media were identified. Constantly obtaining information through social media, constantly seeing reports, news, announcements and other people's life trends have caused constant stress. The successful lives, exhibitions and images of other people have had effects such as realizing that one's life is worthless. Constantly checking social media due to the fear of losing friends or disappearing, which has increased stress, were identified here.

This research found that sleep deprivation and sleep delay due to social media use are another factor that can cause stress. In a study by Efek Jihajadakadataha (2024), the relationship between social media use among professionals was examined. Accordingly, this study identified a relationship between social media use and stress.

A Lebanese study found that social media use is associated with depression, anxiety, and sleep problems. A somewhat heated response to emotional feelings caused by encountering false or additional information in a depressed person was also identified as a cause of stress. The fear of revealing personal messages, data exchanges, and confidential information, and the acceptance that all knowledge including social media accounts can be seen by other people, increased stress.

This mental stress has developed due to seeing one's own life as weak by seeing the successful lives of other people as role models. Mental health can only be maintained when internet use is used appropriately with attention and limits. Unnecessary use of social media causes stress, discontent, and distrust in the family.

5. Finding solutions to family problems through artificial intelligence technology

With the rapid growth of the use of the Internet and social media, high-tech solutions, especially artificial intelligence:The search for solutions has been innovative, but they are not suitable for the problems that arise in real relationships. It has developed into a breakdown in direct communication, lack of trust, loss of sensitivity, and even a violation of privacy. Accordingly, although artificial intelligence technology can be used as a helper, it was identified in this research that using it as the main solution to family problems has led to the emergence of other problems.

6. Deep fake technology and trust issues

The data contributors indicate that the family's trust has been broken by inaccurate fake images or videos about themselves or people in their lives. Even if this information is false, it is difficult to identify it at the initial stage, which has led to a breach of trust. It can be identified that the trust has been broken by creating false propaganda about relationships with other people using fake technology on social media and showing it to a family member. The safe environment of the family has also been broken by creating fake images and videos of children using fake technology. This has caused severe psychological stress among parents. Many people indicate that they have been mentally stressed due to the breakdown of trust through fake technology and have felt sad and lonely. Artificial intelligence and fake technology have made it difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood, which has led to suspicion and opposition in family discussions. It is also clear that the distribution of false information through social media has led to suspicion even for mistakes that were not committed.

"I started a romantic relationship with a person I met on Instagram. I went to meet him. It was only after that that I found out that he was twenty years older than he told me, which means he was about fifty years old. But he had edited his photos so that I could not recognize that" Karawita area, 2025.05.18"

With the acceptance of such content as truth without understanding deep fake technology, the breach of trust has rapidly occurred. It has also led to various conflicts within the family. In order to protect the modern family institution, it is especially important to develop an understanding of technology and maintain direct communication. Accurately identifying deep fake technology and separating truth from problems is essential to securing living relationships.

7. Conclusion

According to this study, the specific points identified can be reviewed as follows.

Although it is easy to connect remotely through technology, there is a decrease in direct communication, less conversations between parents and children, and a breakdown in relationships between friends. Live communication has been lost due to the young generation's complete dependence on social media. Traditional communication based on voice, eyes, and emotions has been distanced. This is why family relationships, trust between friends, and social perspectives are being broken. Due to the high growth in the use of the Internet and social media, face-to-face or direct communication between family members has decreased, and on the contrary, family relationships have been weakened due to the excessive time spent on social media messaging. It was identified that problems that should usually be shared between family members, attempts to convey blessings through the Internet, and lack of thoughtfulness in direct communication were identified. As a result, there has been a strong impact on the quality of communication and family relationships, and this was identified as a characteristic that affects family peace and unity.

With the growth of the use of the Internet and social media, problems related to drug addiction have become a highly visible mental problem in modern families. Excessive addiction to social media and contact with others at various times in personal life have led to a decrease in direct communication and closeness between family members. This leads to problems of lack of trust, honesty, etc. Situations that occur on the Internet also allow for emotional deception with other people. A person who is not satisfied with their romantic relationships often seeks attention and support from others through social networks, which has damaged trust.

The time spent on social media has reduced family discussions and social interactions. This has led to a loss of trust and has led to a feeling of being ignored by other family members. Children have been exposed to illegal or inappropriate social media use without proper guidance. This loss of parental trust has also led to the breakdown of strong family relationships. Spending time on social media has caused a mother or father to forget about their daily household chores. This is a burden on family members and has led to disagreements between family members due to not doing the tasks that should be done together. Such situations have created disputes, feelings of guilt and crises in the family. Children are seen using social media and being addicted to gaming apps during their free time, and not doing the household chores that are assigned to them, such as cleaning their rooms and helping with cooking. Social media allows individuals to connect with a wide range of people. There is a possibility. This has led to hidden communication, extramarital affairs and a lack of trust in marriage and family relationships.

The lack of trust has led to domestic disputes and even domestic violence. Mothers or fathers have forgotten to take care of their children. It has been understood that children and other family members behave in a way that is objectionable, argumentative and violent after such risky behavior. People compare their lives with the lives of others through the views expressed on social media. This has led to unhappiness, frustration and conflict.

Also, the promotion of drug-related information and isolation have facilitated sexual and drug addictions. These addictions have disrupted family peace, reduced trust and love, and caused arguments and problems among family members. In particular, drug addiction has led to family economic instability, health problems and mental disorders, and sexual addiction has reduced family peace and security.

The main problem here is the breakdown of family peace due to false legal advice obtained from the Internet. In addition, the fact that the Internet has been given a greater role in family problems without obtaining correct legal advice has led to the development of these problems. It was identified that they have been subjected to cyberbullying due to public postings such as children's photos and school information, and for this, they have also resorted to legal action.

It was found that the failure of family financial management has led to distrust, tension, frequent arguments and economic instability among family members. In particular, the lack of agreement on spending decisions and the inequality in sharing financial responsibilities have led to the breakdown of family peace. Informal relationships are when a person who is married or legally related has a relationship with another person outside that relationship in a way that violates the boundaries of the family.

This research has identified that this has always caused stress, sadness, distrust and many psychological problems for other family members. Children in the family have resorted to informal relationships due to factors such as social role models, social media influences. Business pressures, long-term separations and communication weaknesses have also contributed to this. Every person has different feelings about their life, but in many cases there is a tendency to compare their life, abilities, assets, image, achievements etc. with other people. This type of comparison has increased nowadays, especially through social media. This is because people.

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Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Women in Multilateral Donor-Funded Development Projects in Sri Lanka: A Gender-Responsive Framework for Inclusive Economic Growth and Sustainable Development

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Abstract : Women's participation in the labour force is a critical driver of inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. Despite Sri Lanka's high levels of female literacy, educational attainment, and human development, female labour force participation remains substantially lower than that of men, limiting the country's economic potential and inclusive development. Multilateral donor-funded development projects financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other development partners have increasingly integrated gender equality and women's economic empowerment into their development strategies through employment generation, skills development, entrepreneurship promotion, and value chain integration. This study examines the contribution of these donor-funded projects to enhancing women's employment opportunities in Sri Lanka and proposes a gender-responsive framework to strengthen inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, utilizing secondary labour market statistics, policy and project document analysis, gender and development literature, and comparative case studies of selected donor-funded projects. The findings reveal that, despite significant policy commitments and gender mainstreaming initiatives, women's participation in project-related employment remains constrained by socio-cultural norms, occupational segregation, limited access to technical and vocational training, inadequate representation in leadership positions, workplace safety concerns, unpaid care responsibilities, and institutional weaknesses in project implementation and monitoring. The study proposes a comprehensive gender-responsive framework encompassing inclusive project design, gender-responsive procurement and recruitment, targeted capacity-building programmes, safe and supportive work environments, strengthened institutional accountability, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems. The framework provides practical guidance for policymakers, development partners, and implementing agencies to enhance women's employment outcomes, strengthen gender equality, and maximise the contribution of donor-funded development projects to sustainable and inclusive economic development in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Women's Employment , Gender-Responsive Development , Multilateral Donor-Funded Projects

1. Introduction

Gender equality has become one of the most significant priorities in international development policy over the past several decades. It is widely recognized that achieving sustainable economic growth, reducing poverty, and promoting social inclusion are impossible without ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. International organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other multilateral development partners, increasingly integrate gender equality into development planning and investment strategies. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 reinforced this global commitment, particularly through SDG 5 (Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls) and SDG 8 (Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All). These goals recognize that increasing women's participation in the labour force is not only a matter of social justice but also a key driver of economic development, innovation, productivity, and national competitiveness.

Numerous international studies have demonstrated that greater female labour force participation contributes significantly to economic growth. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), narrowing gender gaps in employment can substantially increase gross domestic product (GDP), improve household incomes, reduce poverty, and strengthen economic resilience. Likewise, the World Bank emphasizes that empowering women economically creates multiplier effects, including improved child health, higher educational attainment, enhanced household welfare, and stronger community development. Consequently, promoting women's employment has become an essential component of development assistance provided by multilateral donor agencies across developing countries.

Sri Lanka presents a unique and somewhat paradoxical case in the relationship between human development and women's economic participation. The country has long been recognized for its exceptional achievements in education, healthcare, and social development relative to other lower-middle-income nations. Successive investments in free education and universal healthcare have resulted in high levels of human capital development among women. Female literacy exceeds 93 percent, and women consistently outperform men in secondary and tertiary education enrolment. Sri Lanka also records favourable indicators in maternal health, life expectancy, and gender parity in educational attainment. These achievements reflect decades of public investment in human development and have positioned Sri Lanka as one of South Asia's strongest performers on several gender-related social indicators.

Despite these remarkable accomplishments, women's participation in the labour market remains persistently low. The country's female labour force participation rate has shown only modest improvement over the past two decades and continues to lag far behind that of men. According to the World Bank, female labour force participation was approximately 31.6 percent in 2024, compared with nearly 70 percent for males. Women account for only about one-third of Sri Lanka's total labour force despite representing more than half of the national population and possessing educational qualifications that often exceed those of their male counterparts. This discrepancy represents one of the lowest female labour force participation rates among middle-income countries in Asia and highlights a significant underutilization of human capital.

The persistence of low female labour force participation reflects a complex interaction of economic, institutional, cultural, and social factors. Traditional gender norms continue to assign women primary responsibility for unpaid household work, childcare, and elderly care, limiting their availability for formal employment. Workplace discrimination, occupational segregation, unequal wages, limited career advancement opportunities, and inadequate workplace facilities further discourage women's participation in the labour market. In addition, insufficient access to affordable childcare services, safe transportation, flexible working arrangements, and social protection mechanisms creates substantial barriers to women's economic engagement. Rural women, women from low-income households, and women affected by conflict or natural disasters often experience these challenges more severely, resulting in greater socioeconomic exclusion.

These challenges have become increasingly significant in the context of Sri Lanka's ongoing economic recovery and development agenda. Following the country's recent economic crisis, expanding employment opportunities and increasing labour force participation have become national priorities. Enhancing women's participation in productive employment is widely recognized as an effective strategy for accelerating economic recovery, improving household resilience, reducing poverty, and increasing national productivity. Consequently, both the Government of Sri Lanka and international development partners have emphasized gender-inclusive growth as an important component of future development policies and investment programmes.

Multilateral donor-funded development projects play an increasingly influential role in supporting Sri Lanka's economic and social development. Organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations agencies, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other bilateral and multilateral partners finance a broad range of projects across sectors including agriculture, livestock development, irrigation, infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, transport, urban development, climate resilience, rural livelihoods, enterprise development, environmental management, education, and community-based development. These projects create substantial employment opportunities through both direct project implementation and indirect economic activities generated by project investments.

In recent years, donor agencies have increasingly incorporated gender mainstreaming into project design and implementation. Gender action plans, gender-responsive budgeting, inclusive procurement practices, skills development programmes, and gender-sensitive monitoring frameworks have become common features of development interventions. Many projects explicitly aim to increase women's access to employment, entrepreneurship, financial services, vocational training, leadership opportunities, and productive assets. Furthermore, international financing institutions increasingly require borrowing governments to demonstrate compliance with gender safeguards and social inclusion policies as part of project approval and implementation processes.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that women remain underrepresented in many donor-funded employment opportunities, particularly in sectors traditionally dominated by men such as construction, transport, irrigation, infrastructure development, engineering, and water resource management. Women's participation is often concentrated in lower-paid, temporary, or less-skilled positions, while leadership, technical, and decision-making roles remain predominantly occupied by men. In several projects, gender targets focus primarily on beneficiary participation rather than sustainable employment creation or long-term economic empowerment. Moreover, project implementation frequently encounters institutional capacity constraints, inadequate gender expertise, insufficient monitoring systems, and deeply rooted cultural norms that limit the effectiveness of gender interventions.

Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding of the factors that influence women's participation in donor-funded development projects and the effectiveness of existing gender mainstreaming strategies. It is important to assess whether current project designs adequately respond to women's needs, whether institutional arrangements support inclusive employment practices, and whether project outcomes contribute to meaningful and sustainable economic empowerment rather than merely fulfilling numerical participation targets. Such analysis can provide valuable evidence for improving future development programmes and strengthening the contribution of donor investments to gender equality.

Against this background, this study investigates how multilateral donor-funded development projects can become more effective vehicles for promoting women's employment and economic empowerment across Sri Lanka. The research seeks to examine the institutional, social, economic, and policy factors that influence women's access to project-related employment opportunities and to evaluate the effectiveness of current gender mainstreaming approaches adopted by development partners and implementing agencies. Furthermore, the study aims to identify practical strategies that can enhance women's participation in skilled employment, leadership positions, entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities within donor-funded projects.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both academic knowledge and development practice by generating evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, donor agencies, project implementing institutions, and other stakeholders involved in development planning. Strengthening women's employment through donor-funded projects has the potential not only to advance gender equality but also to improve project effectiveness, promote inclusive economic growth, strengthen community resilience, and support Sri Lanka's long-term sustainable development objectives. As the country seeks to build a more inclusive and resilient economy, ensuring that women can fully participate in and benefit from development investments will remain a critical priority for achieving equitable and sustainable national development.

2. Problem Statement

Despite sustained national and international commitments to promoting gender equality, women's participation in Sri Lanka's labour market remains significantly lower than that of men. This persistent gender gap exists despite the country's notable achievements in female education, literacy, and human development. Women account for more than half of the population and consistently demonstrate high educational attainment; however, female labour force participation has remained at approximately one-third of the working-age female population. This disparity represents a substantial underutilization of human capital and limits Sri Lanka's ability to achieve inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.

Multilateral donor-funded development projects financed by organizations such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other development partners are expected to contribute to women's economic empowerment by creating employment opportunities, strengthening vocational and technical skills, supporting entrepreneurship, and improving access to productive resources. Most donor-funded projects incorporate gender mainstreaming through Gender Action Plans (GAPs), gender-responsive procurement, capacity-building programmes, inclusive consultation mechanisms, and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that the employment benefits generated by these projects are not distributed equally between women and men.

Women continue to be underrepresented in project-related employment, particularly in technical, managerial, engineering, infrastructure, transport, irrigation, and construction sectors where donor investments are substantial. Their participation is often concentrated in temporary, low-skilled, or lower-paid positions, while opportunities for long-term employment, leadership, and decision-making remain limited. In many instances, project gender indicators emphasize participation rates or the number of female beneficiaries rather than measuring sustainable employment outcomes, income generation, career progression, or long-term economic empowerment. Furthermore, institutional capacity constraints, inadequate gender expertise, weak implementation of gender action plans, insufficient monitoring systems, and deeply embedded socio-cultural norms continue to undermine the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming initiatives.

Although numerous studies have examined female labour force participation and gender equality in Sri Lanka, relatively limited research has specifically investigated the effectiveness of multilateral donor-funded development projects in creating sustainable employment opportunities for women across different sectors. Existing studies often focus on individual projects, specific sectors, or policy implementation without providing a comprehensive assessment of the institutional, economic, social, and cultural factors influencing women's employment outcomes within donor-funded interventions. Consequently, there remains a significant knowledge gap regarding the extent to which current project designs, implementation mechanisms, and monitoring systems effectively promote women's economic participation and address structural barriers to employment.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining the factors influencing women's employment in multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka and evaluating the effectiveness of existing gender-responsive approaches. Specifically, the study seeks to answer four key questions: (1) Why does female labour force participation remain low despite high levels of educational attainment? (2) What economic, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers prevent women from benefiting equally from donor-funded development projects? (3) How can donor-funded development projects be redesigned to maximize women's access to quality employment, leadership opportunities, and economic empowerment? and (4) What lessons can be drawn from successful donor-funded interventions to develop a comprehensive gender-responsive framework for future development projects in Sri Lanka? Addressing these questions will provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, development partners, and implementing agencies to strengthen gender-responsive project design, enhance women's employment outcomes, and contribute to inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

3. Research Objectives

General Objective

To assess strategies for enhancing women's employment opportunities in multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka.

Specific Objectives

- Examine the current status of women's labour force participation in Sri Lanka, with particular attention to employment within multilateral donor-funded development projects.
- Analyze the gender-related barriers and challenges that limit women's participation and employment in multilateral donor-funded development projects.
- Review and evaluate the experiences, policies, and outcomes of selected multilateral donor-funded development projects in promoting women's employment and gender inclusion.
- Develop a policy framework to enhance women's employment opportunities and strengthen gender-responsive practices in multilateral donor-funded development projects.
- Recommend institutional, operational, and policy reforms to improve women's participation, employment outcomes, and gender equality within multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory, the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory and the Capability Approach. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive basis for examining women's employment opportunities in multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka. While Human Capital Theory explains how investments in education and skills enhance employability, GAD Theory highlights the structural and institutional factors that shape gender inequality. The Capability Approach extends the analysis by emphasizing the expansion of women's freedoms, agency, and opportunities beyond employment alone.

2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, developed by Becker (1964), posits that investments in education, training, and skills development increase individuals' productivity, earning potential, and employment opportunities. The theory suggests that human capital accumulation contributes to both individual economic advancement and broader economic growth by improving labour market efficiency and productivity.

Within the context of multilateral donor-funded development projects, Human Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how vocational training, technical education, entrepreneurship development, and capacity-building initiatives enhance women's employability. Development interventions supported by international donors frequently invest in skills development programs aimed at improving women's access to formal employment, self-employment, and income-generating opportunities. However, while human capital investments are necessary for improving employment outcomes, they may not be sufficient to overcome structural gender inequalities that continue to limit women's labour market participation.

2.2 Gender and Development (GAD) Theory

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach emerged during the 1980s as a response to earlier Women in Development (WID) perspectives, shifting the focus from women's individual disadvantages to the broader social, economic, political, and institutional structures that produce gender inequality. Rather than viewing women as isolated beneficiaries of development interventions, GAD emphasizes transforming unequal gender relations and promoting equitable access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making.

The GAD framework recognizes that women's employment outcomes are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including prevailing social norms, discriminatory institutional arrangements, unequal power relations, and differential access to productive resources. These structural constraints often persist even when women possess comparable education and skills to men. Consequently, the GAD perspective provides an appropriate analytical lens for assessing whether donor-funded development projects address the systemic barriers that restrict women's employment and economic empowerment in Sri Lanka.

2.3 Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen (1999), conceptualizes development as the expansion of individuals' freedoms and capabilities to achieve the lives they value. Unlike conventional economic approaches that measure development primarily through income or employment, the Capability Approach emphasizes the importance of expanding people's substantive opportunities, agency, and choices.

Within multilateral donor-funded development projects, this perspective suggests that successful employment interventions should extend beyond job creation to strengthen women's capabilities through skills development, increased decision-making power, economic independence, and social inclusion. Employment should therefore be viewed not merely as an economic outcome but as a means of enhancing women's overall well-being, autonomy, and participation in society. This framework is particularly relevant for evaluating the broader social and developmental impacts of donor-funded initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

2.4 Conceptual Integration

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for this study. Human Capital Theory explains how investments in education and skills can improve women's employability, GAD Theory highlights the structural and institutional barriers that may constrain employment despite such investments, and the Capability Approach emphasizes the broader objective of enhancing women's freedoms, agency, and overall well-being. Collectively, these theories offer a robust foundation for analysing the effectiveness of multilateral donor-funded development projects in expanding women's employment opportunities and promoting gender-responsive development in Sri Lanka.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of strategies for enhancing women's employment opportunities in multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka. The mixed-methods approach enables the study to combine statistical analysis of labour market trends with an in-depth examination of policy frameworks, project experiences, and institutional practices. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence facilitates a more robust understanding of the factors influencing women's employment and the effectiveness of donor-funded interventions.

3.2 Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from reputable national and international sources.

Quantitative Data

Secondary quantitative data are collected from the following sources:

- World Bank Gender Data Portal
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Department of Census and Statistics (DCS), Sri Lanka
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

These datasets provide information on labour force participation, employment trends, gender disparities, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic indicators relevant to women's employment in Sri Lanka.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data are obtained through a comprehensive review of documentary sources, including:

- Project completion reports of multilateral donor-funded development projects;
- Gender Action Plans (GAPs);
- National policy documents and sectoral strategies;
- Project evaluation and implementation reports;

and Peer-reviewed academic literature, institutional publications, and research reports on gender, employment, and development.

The qualitative evidence is used to examine policy implementation, institutional arrangements, project outcomes, and the barriers and enabling factors affecting women's employment within donor-funded development initiatives.

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to examine trends in women's labour force participation, employment patterns, and gender disparities in Sri Lanka. Qualitative data are analyzed using thematic content analysis, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to gender barriers, institutional practices, policy implementation, and the effectiveness of multilateral donor-funded projects. The findings from both approaches are integrated to provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening women's employment opportunities and promoting gender-responsive development.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Findings

The analysis demonstrates that despite Sri Lanka's strong achievements in female education and human development, women's participation in the labour market remains considerably lower than that of men. Evidence from the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), Department of Census and Statistics (DCS), and project completion reports from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) indicates that multilateral donor-funded development projects have contributed to improving women's economic participation, although the overall employment outcomes remain below their potential.

The quantitative findings reveal persistent gender disparities in labour force participation, while qualitative evidence from donor-funded projects suggests that targeted gender-responsive interventions can substantially improve women's employment, entrepreneurship, leadership, and income generation. However, structural barriers including socio-cultural norms, occupational segregation, inadequate technical skills, workplace safety concerns, discriminatory recruitment practices, and unpaid care responsibilities continue to limit women's full participation in development initiatives.

The findings are discussed under four broad themes: (i) women's labour force participation in Sri Lanka, (ii) women's employment outcomes in donor-funded development projects, (iii) barriers affecting women's employment, and (iv) implications for gender-responsive project design.

4.2 Women's Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka

The analysis confirms that Sri Lanka exhibits one of the largest gender gaps in labour force participation among upper-middle-income countries in Asia. Although women account for more than half of the country's population and have achieved educational outcomes comparable to or exceeding those of men, their participation in formal employment remains significantly lower.

Table 1. Labour Market Indicators by Gender (2024)

Indicator	Women	Men
Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	31.6	69.7
Share of Total Labour Force (%)	33.2	66.8
Unemployment Rate (%)	8.0	3.5
Literacy Rate (%)	>93	~92
Population Share (%)	52	48

(Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal; ILOSTAT; Department of Census and Statistics,2024)

The statistics illustrate a striking paradox. Female literacy exceeds 93%, and women outperform men in several educational indicators, yet these achievements have not translated into comparable labour market participation. Female labour force participation (31.6%) is less than half that of men (69.7%), while unemployment among women remains more than twice the male unemployment rate.

This disparity indicates that educational attainment alone is insufficient to ensure women's economic inclusion.

Instead, labour market outcomes are shaped by institutional, cultural, and structural constraints that continue to limit women's access to decent employment.

From the perspective of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), increased investment in education should improve labour productivity and employment opportunities. However, the findings suggest that the returns to women's education remain constrained by labour market discrimination, occupational segregation, and unequal access to employment opportunities. Consequently, improving women's skills without addressing structural barriers is unlikely to substantially increase female employment.

6.3 Women's Employment in Multilateral Donor-Funded Development Projects

A comparative review of major donor-funded projects indicates that gender mainstreaming has become an integral component of project planning across multilateral development agencies. Most projects now include Gender Action Plans (GAPs), gender-sensitive monitoring indicators, and targets for women's participation. Nevertheless, the extent to which these measures translate into actual employment varies considerably across projects.

Table 2. Gender-Responsive Components in Selected Development Projects

Donor Agency	Project Focus	Key Gender Interventions	Employment Outcomes for Women
Asian Development Bank	Smallholder Agribusiness and Resilience Project	Farmer organizations, agribusiness training, value-chain development	Increased participation in agricultural enterprises and producer organizations
Asian Development Bank	Integrated Road Investment Program	Community maintenance work, road safety, enterprise development	Expanded local employment and income opportunities
World Bank	Climate Smart Irrigated Agriculture Project	Farmer producer groups, climate-smart agriculture, processing activities	Greater involvement in value addition and agricultural enterprises
IFAD	Rural Livelihood Development Projects	Rural entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, producer organizations	Improved income generation and household decision-making
JICA	Technical Cooperation Programmes	Skills development, vocational training, community capacity building	Enhanced employability and technical competencies

The comparative analysis demonstrates that donor-funded projects have contributed to women's employment through multiple pathways rather than direct wage employment alone. These include:

- agricultural value chain participation;
- rural entrepreneurship;
- vocational and technical skills development;
- producer organizations;
- financial inclusion;
- community-based infrastructure maintenance; and
- small enterprise development.

Among the reviewed agencies, IFAD projects showed particularly strong outcomes in promoting women's participation in producer organizations and rural entrepreneurship. Women involved in these projects reported improved household incomes, greater financial independence, and increased participation in community decision-making.

Similarly, the World Bank's Climate Smart Irrigated Agriculture Project promoted women's participation in climate-resilient agriculture and agricultural processing, enabling women to diversify income sources beyond subsistence farming.

ADB projects demonstrated notable progress in integrating gender considerations into infrastructure investments. Traditionally, infrastructure projects have generated employment primarily for men. However, recent ADB initiatives increasingly incorporate employment opportunities for women through community-based maintenance, environmental management, and support services.

JICA's technical cooperation programmes focused primarily on enhancing women's employability through vocational education and technical skills development rather than direct employment generation. These programmes strengthened women's capacity to compete in local labour markets and participate in community development activities.

Overall, the findings suggest that donor-funded projects have increasingly shifted from welfare-oriented approaches toward economic empowerment strategies that promote women's productive participation.

6.4 Sectoral Distribution of Women's Employment

The analysis also reveals substantial sectoral differences in women's employment opportunities.

Table 3. Women's Participation across Major Project Sectors

Sector	Women's Participation	Major Constraints
Agriculture	High	Limited land ownership; market access
Livestock	Moderate–High	Limited technical training
Rural Enterprise	High	Financial constraints
Water Supply & Sanitation	Moderate	Limited technical positions
Infrastructure & Construction	Low	Gender stereotypes; contractor preferences
Irrigation	Low	Heavy manual work; technical skill gaps
Transport	Very Low	Occupational segregation
Renewable Energy	Emerging	Limited technical expertise
Digital Economy	Emerging	Skills shortages

Agriculture remains the largest sector employing women within donor-funded projects. However, women are primarily engaged in lower-value activities such as cultivation, processing, and marketing rather than higher-income technical or managerial positions.

Infrastructure projects continue to exhibit the lowest levels of female employment. Construction contractors frequently recruit male workers due to prevailing stereotypes regarding physical labour, despite growing opportunities for women in surveying, environmental monitoring, project administration, procurement, community engagement, and occupational health and safety.

The emerging sectors of renewable energy, climate resilience, and digital technology present new opportunities for expanding women's employment. Nevertheless, participation remains constrained by limited access to technical education and vocational training.

6.5 Structural Barriers Affecting Women's Employment

The thematic analysis identified six major barriers consistently reported across project evaluations and policy documents.

Socio-cultural norms

Traditional gender roles continue to assign women primary responsibility for childcare, household management, and unpaid domestic work. These expectations restrict women's mobility, reduce their availability for full-time employment, and discourage participation in occupations perceived as masculine.

Many women decline employment opportunities that require travel, relocation, or irregular working hours due to family responsibilities and societal expectations.

Occupational segregation

Women remain concentrated in traditionally female occupations such as education, healthcare, and garment manufacturing. Their participation in engineering, construction, irrigation management, transport, and heavy infrastructure remains extremely limited.

This occupational segregation significantly reduces women's access to higher-paying technical occupations supported by development projects.

Skills gaps

Project documentation consistently identifies inadequate technical and vocational skills as one of the principal barriers to women's employment.

Although women possess relatively high levels of general education, many lack specialized competencies required for employment in engineering, digital technology, renewable energy, construction, and modern agricultural systems.

These findings support the Capability Approach, which argues that expanding people's opportunities requires enhancing their capabilities rather than merely providing formal access to employment.

Workplace safety concerns

Safety remains an important determinant of women's employment decisions.

Several project evaluations highlighted concerns relating to:

- inadequate transport;
- absence of separate sanitation facilities;
- limited childcare services;
- insecure accommodation for field staff; and
- weak mechanisms for addressing workplace harassment.

Improving workplace safety therefore represents an essential component of gender-responsive project implementation.

Procurement and recruitment practices

Many donor-funded infrastructure projects outsource employment through contractors.

Although donor agencies increasingly include gender requirements within bidding documents, contractors frequently prioritize rapid recruitment of experienced male workers rather than investing in training women.

Weak enforcement of contractual gender obligations limits the effectiveness of Gender Action Plans.

Unpaid care responsibilities

Women continue to undertake substantially more unpaid domestic work than men.

Time devoted to childcare, elder care, food preparation, and household management reduces women's availability for wage employment and vocational training.

Without supportive measures such as childcare facilities and flexible work arrangements, labour force participation is unlikely to increase significantly.

6.6 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that donor-funded development projects possess considerable untapped potential for promoting women's employment in Sri Lanka. Although gender mainstreaming has become standard practice across multilateral agencies, many projects continue to emphasize women's participation in consultations, awareness programmes, and community organizations rather than generating substantial employment opportunities.

This observation supports the Gender and Development (GAD) framework, which argues that gender inequality is embedded within institutional structures rather than resulting solely from individual disadvantages. Consequently, increasing women's employment requires structural reforms in project design, recruitment, procurement, monitoring, and institutional accountability.

The comparative project review further indicates that projects producing the strongest employment outcomes combine several complementary interventions rather than relying on isolated training activities. These include vocational education, financial inclusion, market access, leadership development, producer organizations, and supportive workplace policies.

The findings also demonstrate that employment quality is as important as employment quantity. Sustainable economic empowerment requires women to access decent work characterized by equal pay, career progression, leadership opportunities, social protection, and safe working conditions. Short-term casual employment alone is unlikely to generate lasting improvements in women's economic status.

Another important finding concerns the growing importance of climate resilience and green economy initiatives. As donor investments increasingly focus on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, climate-smart infrastructure, and digital transformation, new opportunities are emerging for women to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations. However, realizing these opportunities will require substantial investment in technical and vocational education.

The evidence further suggests that Gender Action Plans are most effective when supported by measurable employment targets, dedicated budgets, contractor compliance mechanisms, and regular monitoring. Projects lacking these elements often achieve high levels of female participation in meetings and consultations but comparatively low levels of employment generation.

Finally, the findings reinforce the importance of institutional coordination among government agencies, donor organizations, contractors, civil society organizations, and local communities. Women's employment cannot be addressed solely through isolated project interventions; rather, it requires an integrated policy environment that simultaneously addresses education, labour market regulation, social protection, childcare, transportation, workplace safety, and private sector engagement.

Overall, the results demonstrate that multilateral donor-funded development projects can significantly contribute to women's economic empowerment when gender equality is integrated throughout the project cycle from project identification and design to procurement, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Moving from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative approaches will be essential for increasing women's employment, reducing labour market inequalities, and advancing inclusive economic growth and sustainable development in Sri Lanka.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the role of multilateral donor-funded development projects in enhancing employment opportunities for women in Sri Lanka within the broader context of inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. Although Sri Lanka has achieved remarkable progress in female education, literacy, and health outcomes, these achievements have not translated into equitable labour market participation. Women continue to experience significantly lower labour force participation rates than men, reflecting persistent structural, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers.

The findings demonstrate that multilateral development partners, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other international organizations, have made notable progress in integrating gender equality into development programming. Through Gender Action Plans, vocational skills development, livelihood enhancement programmes, rural entrepreneurship initiatives, financial inclusion, and value chain development, these projects have created important opportunities for improving women's economic participation. Nevertheless, the overall impact on employment remains uneven across sectors and projects.

The study identified several interrelated barriers that continue to constrain women's participation in project-related employment, including entrenched socio-cultural norms, occupational segregation, limited access to technical and vocational skills, inadequate workplace safety measures, gender-insensitive procurement practices, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care responsibilities. These barriers highlight that improving women's employment requires more than increasing educational attainment or creating temporary job opportunities; it requires addressing the structural factors that influence women's access to decent work and economic opportunities.

The findings further suggest that donor-funded development projects are most effective when gender equality is integrated throughout the entire project cycle from project identification and design to procurement, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Gender-responsive employment targets, inclusive procurement systems, technical capacity development, safe working environments, institutional accountability, and comprehensive monitoring mechanisms are critical components of successful interventions. Moving beyond gender-sensitive approaches toward gender-transformative strategies will enable development projects to challenge existing inequalities and create sustainable pathways for women's economic empowerment.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the relevance of Human Capital Theory, the Gender and Development (GAD) framework, and the Capability Approach in explaining women's employment outcomes within development projects. While investments in education and skills remain essential, they must be complemented by institutional reforms that expand women's capabilities, remove structural barriers, and create enabling environments for equitable labour market participation.

Ultimately, enhancing women's employment in multilateral donor-funded development projects should be viewed not only as a social or gender equality objective but also as an economic and developmental imperative. Increasing women's participation in productive employment contributes to higher household incomes, poverty reduction, improved productivity, stronger community resilience, and more inclusive national economic growth. As Sri Lanka continues to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its broader development agenda, strengthening gender-responsive employment policies and practices within donor-funded projects will be essential for achieving sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen women's employment opportunities in multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka. These recommendations are intended to support policymakers, development partners, implementing agencies, contractors, and other stakeholders in promoting gender-responsive employment practices while contributing to inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Employment Targets

The Government of Sri Lanka, in collaboration with multilateral development partners including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other development agencies, should establish mandatory employment targets for women in donor-funded projects. These targets should specify minimum levels of female participation across skilled, semi-skilled, technical, supervisory, managerial, and leadership positions. Gender-responsive employment indicators should be incorporated into project design documents, financing agreements, procurement plans, implementation schedules, and monitoring frameworks to ensure measurable outcomes and institutional accountability.

Strengthen Gender-Responsive Procurement Systems

Procurement policies should be redesigned to promote women's employment throughout project supply chains. Contractors and consultants should be required to prepare Gender Employment Plans as part of the bidding process, outlining strategies for recruiting, retaining, and promoting women. Bid evaluation criteria should reward firms that demonstrate commitments to equal employment opportunities, equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe working conditions, gender-sensitive workplace facilities, and support for women-owned enterprises. Regular compliance monitoring and contractual enforcement mechanisms should be integrated into project supervision.

Expand Technical and Vocational Skills Development

Limited technical competencies remain a major barrier to women's participation in infrastructure and other non-traditional sectors. Development partners should invest in market-driven Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes that equip women with skills relevant to construction, engineering, renewable energy, digital technologies, climate-smart agriculture, irrigation management, water supply, transport, and agribusiness. Partnerships among government institutions, vocational training centres, universities, and private sector employers should ensure that training programmes respond to current labour market demands and facilitate employment placement upon completion.

Promote Women's Leadership and Career Advancement

Women's participation should extend beyond entry-level employment to decision-making and leadership positions. Development projects should establish structured mentoring programmes, leadership training, career development initiatives, and succession planning mechanisms to prepare women for managerial, technical, and supervisory roles. Increasing women's representation in project management units, procurement committees, engineering teams, safeguard functions, and steering committees will contribute to more inclusive governance and improved project effectiveness.

Ensure Safe, Inclusive, and Gender-Responsive Workplaces

Safe working environments are fundamental to women's participation in development projects. All donor-funded interventions should implement comprehensive workplace policies addressing gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), occupational health and safety, and workplace discrimination. Project sites should provide separate sanitation facilities, secure transportation, adequate lighting, childcare support where appropriate, breastfeeding facilities, safe accommodation, and confidential grievance redress mechanisms. Contractors and project personnel should receive regular training on gender equality, workplace ethics, and codes of conduct.

Reduce Constraints Associated with Unpaid Care Responsibilities

The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work continues to restrict women's labour market participation. Development projects should incorporate family-friendly employment policies, including flexible working arrangements, maternity protection measures, childcare services, and community-based childcare facilities in project areas. Such interventions would enable women to balance household responsibilities while participating more actively in productive employment and skills development activities.

Strengthen Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment

Beyond wage employment, donor-funded projects should promote women's entrepreneurship by improving access to finance, business advisory services, digital technologies, producer organizations, market information systems, and value chain integration. Special attention should be given to supporting women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) through preferential procurement opportunities, business incubation programmes, financial literacy training, and access to domestic and international markets. Strengthening women's enterprises will contribute to local economic development and long-term livelihood resilience.

Strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation, and Gender Accountability

Monitoring and evaluation systems should assess not only women's participation but also the quality and sustainability of employment outcomes. Projects should collect comprehensive gender-disaggregated data on employment duration, wage equality, occupational categories, leadership positions, skills acquired, enterprise ownership, income growth, promotion rates, and long-term livelihood improvements. Independent gender audits, social safeguard monitoring, and periodic evaluations should be undertaken to assess compliance with Gender Action Plans and inform adaptive project management.

Enhance Institutional Coordination and Policy Coherence

Achieving sustainable improvements in women's employment requires stronger coordination among government ministries, donor agencies, private sector organizations, vocational education institutions, civil society organizations, and local authorities. A national coordination platform should be established to harmonize gender-responsive employment policies, facilitate knowledge sharing, promote best practices, and strengthen collaboration across sectors and donor-funded programmes. Such coordination would improve policy coherence and maximize development impacts.

Develop a National Gender-Responsive Employment Framework

This study recommends the formulation of a comprehensive National Gender-Responsive Employment Framework specifically for multilateral donor-funded development projects in Sri Lanka. The framework should align with the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDGs 5 and 8), International Labour Organization conventions, national labour legislation, and donor safeguard policies. It should establish standardized procedures for gender analysis, employment planning, procurement requirements, monitoring indicators, reporting mechanisms, institutional responsibilities, and performance evaluation. Such a framework would provide a consistent policy foundation for mainstreaming women's employment across all externally financed development interventions.

9. Directions for Future Research

Future studies should move beyond secondary data analysis by undertaking longitudinal and project-level impact assessments that examine the long-term effects of donor-funded development projects on women's employment, income, leadership, and household welfare. Comparative research across South Asian countries would provide valuable insights into regional best practices and innovative policy approaches. Further research should also evaluate the effectiveness of Gender Action Plans, gender-responsive procurement policies, social and environmental safeguard mechanisms, and inclusive labour market interventions in generating sustainable employment outcomes. Additionally, future studies should adopt an intersectional perspective by examining how factors such as disability, age, ethnicity, geographic location, and digital inclusion influence women's access to employment opportunities in development projects.

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