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## **School students' attitude towards the career intention in the tourism industry: The case of North Central Province in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

*Problems associated with the manpower in tourism industry has been long debated. The present study addresses this issue through assessing school students' attitude towards the careers in tourism industry. This study takes place in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka with a sample of 562 school students, whose attitude towards the careers in the tourism industry was assessed through a self-administered questionnaire. The study employs fuzzy sets qualitative comparative analysis to identify the combination of different factors with high or low values that constitute the career intention of the school students. Accordingly, the present study identified that career intention is driven by the combination of high pay / benefits, high industry person congeniality, low social status and low awareness of the industry. The study concludes by forwarding vital implications to the authorities on promoting career intention in the tourism among the school students in Sri Lanka.*

**Keywords:** *Attitudes, career intention, Qualitative Comparative Analysis, tourism.*

### **1. Introduction**

The tourism and hospitality industry worldwide, and in Sri Lanka in particular, has been confronted with the problem of attracting and retaining quality employees. This has led to a shortage of skilled personnel to staff the ever-growing number of tourism and hospitality businesses (Andorka, 1996; Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Lokuhetty, 2014). On

the other hand, as a service oriented industry, majority of services in the tourism industry are produced and consumed simultaneously in direct service encounters where employees and customers are physically and psychologically close enough to influence each other. Therefore, the importance of well-educated, well-trained, skilled, enthusiastic and committed employees cannot be underestimated (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). However, poor image and lack of understanding on job offer has long been debated in the tourism industry (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). This situation is a complex one as many different factors contributing to the problem. These factors include a young transient workforce; low pay; low levels of formal qualifications; high levels of female, students, part-time, and casual workers; a high proportion of low-skilled jobs; a large proportion of hours worked outside normal business hours; a negative industry image in the eyes of potential employees; poor utilization of student labor and high levels of staff turnover (Baum, 2006; Brien, 2004; Deery & Shaw, 1999; Freeland, 2000). In Sri Lankan context, employment in the tourism and hospitality has been identified as a less preferred career option for a variety of reasons including economic reasons, lack of general awareness of the sector, work hours and environment, and sociocultural pressures (Ministry of Tourism and Christian Religious Affairs, 2017). Although various initiatives have been taken to educate and train future tourism professionals, one can never deny the importance of understanding how different attitudes affecting on career intention in the tourism industry.

In Sri Lanka, tourism education is basically offered at four levels; certificate level, diploma level, degree level, and post graduate level. Although, tourism has been identified as a main driving force to develop the country, no tourism related knowledge is given to the students at the school level. If today's students are to become the effective practitioners of tomorrow, it is fundamental to understand their career intentions. Recent statistics further emphasize the labor gap in the industry. According to Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, there is a considerable vacuum in the tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism and Christian Religious Affairs, 2017). This may be due to the fact that the school leavers are not aware of the true potentials of the tourism industry which keep them away from the tourism and hospitality industry. Therefore, identifying their career intention through providing a direct experience is paramount.

Different studies undertaken at different levels have brought light to this area of study. A study done by Ross (1997) revealed that the students with a high career intention towards the tourism industry tends to undergo tertiary level education and training in related to tourism to achieve their career objectives. Another comparative study about the attitudes of secondary school students towards tourism careers in Greece and the United Kingdom conducted by Airey and Frontistis (1997) shows that students in United Kingdom has less positive attitudes towards tourism than the students in Greece. Further, Cothran and Combrink (1999), based on their survey of high school students in Arizona, argue that high school students have more interest in tourism and hospitality careers though they possess a less knowledge on tourism and hospitality industry. On the other hand, Fazio and Williams (1986) also state perceptions and attitudes based on direct experience leave



people with a stronger and more realistic view of the industry and will therefore be more predictive of future behavior.

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) highlight that a very limited number of research studies have been conducted to investigate the career intention of individuals who are more than casually interested in the tourism and hospitality industry. They further categorize the scholarly works on attitudes of individuals on career intention into three groups; attitudes of secondary or high school students towards careers in the tourism and hospitality industry; attitudes of employees who are already working in the tourism and hospitality industry; and attitudes of students who are currently studying tourism and hospitality management at the undergraduate level (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). In this study, it is focused on the attitudes of secondary school students which are in the first category which has little evidence on investigating their career intentions in tourism industry. However, attitudes itself cannot predict the human behavior all the time due to the impact of many moderating variables, conditions and situational constraints causing attitude-behavior discrepancy (Ajzen, 1993; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; McGuire, 1985). Simultaneously, there are many scholars who have studied theories on student attitudes, expectations and career choices from numerous viewpoints. According to Damonte and Vaden (1987), interesting work, advancement potential, secure future, good salary, opportunity for service to society, and social prestige have a great influence on career intention of students in tourism and hospitality industry. Similarly, Blumenfeld et al. (1987) ranked the most influential factors on career intention: (1) type of work; (2) advancement opportunities; (3) company reputation; (4) salary; (5) job security; (6) hours of work; (7) benefits; (8) working conditions; (9) nature of co-workers; and (10) nature of supervisors.

Although there are many factors affecting the career intention, the literature is silent on how combination of different factors determine the career intention. Thus, it is a timely requirement to assess and identify what constitute to the phenomena. Therefore, this empirical study answers following questions: what factors (i.e., sufficient conditions) affect the attitudes and career intentions towards the tourism industry? What pattern of attitudes offer causal configurations that are sufficient to indicate desirable career intentions and undesirable career intentions of school students? What type of attitudes are necessary conditions for achieving the desired responses of school students? The study applied complexity theory as the framework of the research model. The study also used systematic and novel analytical approaches including fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), and necessary condition analysis (NCA), to investigate significant sufficient attitudes that constitute the career intention of tourism and hospitality industry among the school students

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Attitudes and career intention**

Employee attitudes, performance, and behavior are key factors of service quality, which has a direct impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Heskett et al., 1994). Many

scholars have argued that in the service industries, without the positive attitude of employees toward their career and industry, it is impossible to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rosentbluth, 1991; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). The responsibility of providing such a work force to the industry mainly lies with the public and private educational institutes (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Although there is no universally accepted definition, attitude is commonly defined as tendencies to evaluate an entity with some favor or disfavor, ordinarily expressed in cognitive, affective and behavioral responses (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Ajzen (1993) defined attitude as “an individual’s disposition to react with a certain degree of favorableness or unfavorability to an object, behavior, person or event to any other discernible aspect of the individual’s world”.

Attitudes play a vital role in explaining and predicting individuals' behavior. The relationship between attitudes and behavior is controversial where there are many empirical findings showing small to moderate positive relationship between attitudes and behavior (McGuire, 1985). This indicates that studying about attitude will assist to predict the behavior and therefore can be used to evaluate the students' attitude on tourism industry and thus, their intention to work in the tourism industry.

Career decisions of young people, including students, are influenced by their particular skills, knowledge and experiences, which not alone provide them with a profession. Awareness of opportunities available in the job market and external factors such as attitudes also play a vital role (Lewis & Airey, 2001). As Super (1957) has mentioned 'People with certain attitudes are more likely to be attracted to certain types of work than to others; those who have certain values are likely to see more opportunity to achieve them in some fields of work than others'. Though, there are numerous studies to show that high school students are interested in careers in tourism industry (Ross, 1994; Choy 1995; Purcell & Quinn, 1996; Ross, 1997; Cothran & Combrink, 1999), some studies reveal that tourism and hospitality professions perceived to be unattractive (Getz, 1994; Koko & Guerrier, 1994; Cooper & Shepherd, 1997), tedious and low level (Sindiga, 1994), physically repetitive, poorly paid, controlled by task oriented managers and providing limited opportunities for participation and development (Koko & Guerrier, 1994), and offer low-status careers (Cooper & Shepherd, 1997). These findings coincide with Getz (1994) who also implied that tourism jobs are perceived to be undesirable by the students in Spey Valley, Scotland. Many researchers including Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000), Richardson (2008) indicated that the students' attitudes can be categorized under six main variables: awareness of the industry (aware), nature of the work (work), social status (soso), industry person congeniality (ipc), pay and benefits (pay), career intention (ci).

However, individuals' attitudes towards careers in tourism are positive when community involvement in tourism is high in terms of owning or operating tourism businesses by providing a range of career opportunities to local residents (Murphy, 1985). Murphy (1985) further stated that there is a tendency for more positive attitudes to the industry by the individuals who have some involvement or contact with the industry than by those who have no direct attachment with the industry or benefit from tourism. On the other

hand, most influential factor that attracts individuals into the careers in tourism industry is their positive experience and attitudes with the industry (Purcell & Quinn, 1996). Based on the findings of their study, Lewis and Airey (2001) stated that secondary school students in Trinidad and Tobago have favorable and positive attitudes towards engaging in careers in tourism industry, which is strongly influenced by both their work values and information about the industry. The comparative results of United Kingdom and Greece students also fall in the same line where as UK students had less positive attitudes towards tourism careers than their Greek counter parts who have a more realistic view of nature and demand of tourism career (Airey & Frontistis, 1997).

Considering these contradictory research findings, it is questionable when students are given a realistic awareness on tourism industry and career prospects or whether they acquire a less positive attitudes towards the tourism industry. However, Airey and Frontistis (1997) argued that the quality of tourism education system in a country plays a vital role in forming students' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism. Moreover, stakeholders in the tourism industry have to face the challenge of inculcating positive attitudes and providing sufficient and accurate information, guidance and assistance in order to lead the students to the tourism industry (Lewis & Airey, 2001). However, they further emphasis that the information should not unnecessarily diminish the enthusiasm of the students.

## **2.2 Complexity theory**

Complexity theory has been adopted in many disciplines including organization behavior (Anderson, 1999; Fiss, 2007), marketing (Gummesson, 2008; Woodside, 2014, 2015a; Wu et al., 2014) and social sciences (Ragin, 2000; Urry, 2005) which has enabled the researchers to build and test theories. Complexity theory focuses on a pattern phoneme that presents a more in-depth understanding of the relationships between causal antecedents' conditions and outcome conditions (Olya & Altinary, 2016). Tourism consists of different complex notions of interactions and that its dynamics are chaotic non-linear and unstable (McKercher, 1999). Although complexity theory is used in understanding and solving different tourism phenomenon its wide contribution to the field is limited (Stevenson, Airey & Miller, 2009). Newtonian approach in tourism suggests that knowledge is well established in certain parts of the tourism system but there is little knowledge of the relationships and interactions between these parts (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004). Stevenson et al. (2009) further condense that implementation of complexity theory has provided an opportunity for researchers to re-examine the interconnected nature of tourism phenomena and to develop methods and models that attempt to encompass multiple relationships, turbulence and change.

The complexity theory is formed under six main tenets. As Figure 1 shows, the proposed conceptual model for this study has been developed based on complexity theory using a Venn diagram, and the results of fsQCA were evaluated based on the key tenets of this theory. Woodside (2014) lists the six main tenets of complexity theory as follows:

*Tenet 1:* A simple antecedent condition may be necessary, but a simple antecedent condition is rarely sufficient for predicting high or low scores in an outcome condition.

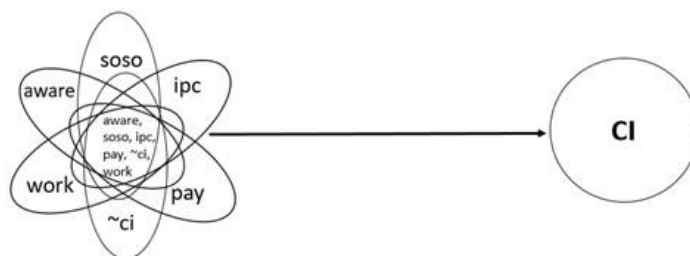
*Tenet 2:* The recipe principle: A complex antecedent condition of two or more simple conditions is sufficient for a consistently high score in an outcome condition.

*Tenet 3:* The equifinality principle: A model that is sufficient is not necessary for an outcome having a high score to occur.

*Tenet 4:* The causal asymmetry: Recipes indicating a second outcome (e.g., rejection) are unique and not the mirror opposites of recipes of a different outcome (e.g., acceptance) principle.

*Tenet 5:* An individual feature (attribute or action) in a recipe can contribute positively or negatively to a specific outcome depending on the presence or absence of the other ingredients in the recipes.

*Tenet 6:* For high Y scores, a given recipe is relevant for some but not all cases; coverage is less than 1.00 for any one recipe. A few exceptions occur for high X scores for a given recipe that works well for predicting high Y scores.



**Figure 1** Complex configurational mode

*Note:* soso = social status, ipc = industry person congeniality, pay = pay and benefits, work = nature of the work, aware = awareness of the industry, ~ci = low career intention, ci = high career intention.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

The population for this research is the advanced level school students in North Central province, Sri Lanka. The data were collected before a workshop conducted by the researchers to enhance school students awareness about the career opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industry. Two workshops were conducted, one in Anuradhapura district and the other in Polonnaruwa district. Students in ten schools were invited to attend to each workshop in each district, which were nominated by the North Central Province Educational Department. Around thirty number of students participated in the workshop representing each school that made a total of 600 students in both workshops. All the participants were given the questionnaires by the research assistants which were

self-administered and all the questionnaires were collected at a 100% response rate. However, only 562 (93%) questionnaires were found to be usable.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first part consisted of questions concerned with students' socio-demographic information. The second part contained 31 item inventory on five scale Likert type ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5) to identify the school students' career intention. The items were factored under six main variables including awareness of the industry (aware), nature of the work (work), social status (soso), industry person congeniality (ipc), pay and benefits (pay), career intention (ci) as identified by Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) and Richardson (2008). Secondary data were also accessed to develop the research problems and the questionnaire for this study.

The sample included 360 (64.1%) male students and 202 (35.9%) female students. Out of the respondents 478 (85%) of them were Buddhists, 49 (8.8%) were Islam, 24 (4.2%) were Hindus. The majority students of (272, 48.4%) were studying in Arts stream, 118 (21%) were in Commerce stream, 70 (12.4%) were from Biological Sciences, 67 (11.9%) were from Physical Sciences and 35 (6.2%) were from Technology stream. Of all the respondents, only 3percent had either of their parents working in the tourism and hospitality sector. Further, about 82.7 percent stated that they were willing to continue their higher studies in the tourism industry, while 87.1 percent of the respondents mentioned that they would like to select a career in tourism and hospitality industry.

Construct validity and reliability were applied to determine the convergent validity and internal consistency of the constructs used in the instrument. For the purpose of reliability, principle component analysis and reliability test based on Cronbach's alpha were used and their results are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, results reveal that sample size was adequate to proceed with analysis to the given constructs. Moreover, communities generated by the analysis were well over 0.5 indicating the construct validity of the measures. Cronbach's alpha coefficients which were ranging from 0.725 to 0.887 confirm the reliability of the constructs used in the instrument.

Table 1  
Results of principle component analysis and reliability test

Variable	No. of Items	KMO	Bartlett's Test		Cronbach's alpha
			Chi Square Value	Sig	
Awareness (aware)	06	.856	1148.082	.000	.887
Nature of the work (work)	05	.842	655.709	.000	.840
Social status (soso)	05	.838	976.953	.000	.884
Industry person congeniality (ipc)	05	.747	195.619	.000	.725
Pay and benefits (pay)	05	.755	156.737	.000	.699
Career intention (ci)	05	.738	276.392	.000	.781

### **3.2 Data analysis**

This study uses fsQCA method to explore how awareness of the industry, nature of the work, social status, industry person congeniality, pay and benefits affect career intention (see Figure 1). The fsQCA is a case-oriented technique that focuses on combinatorial effects. This method assumes asymmetry relationships between independent and dependent variables, and equifinality in which multiple pathways and solutions lead to the same outcome. This method also allows for multifinality in which identical conditions can lead or contribute to different outcomes at different circumstances, and conjunctural causation where causal configurations of conditions can be either necessary or sufficient to achieve the outcome while their constituent conditions might be neither sufficient nor necessary (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Woodside, 2013). Although this is a new methods, the researchers have grown their interest towards the same to handle complex situation. Further, the fsQCA uses the concept of set membership, and thus the raw data must be transformed into fuzzy sets ranging from zero (full exclusion from a set) to one (full inclusion) (Ragin, 2008). Three steps of fsQCA – namely, calibration of data variables, analysis of fuzzy truth table algorithm, and counterfactual analysis of the causal conditions that lead to the school students' career intention outcomes were performed based on Ragin's (2008) guidelines.

However, the study calculates an index for each construct before calibrating the variables by performing the average of the corresponding indicators. The calibration process requires specifying three anchors: full membership, full non-membership, and a crossover point (Ragin, 2008). For all constructs (conditions and outcome), the study uses the direct method for calibrating the fuzzy sets (Ragin, 2008) based on the theoretical anchors (Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014; Silva & Gonçalves, 2016). Thus, in this study the rating of five (calibrated value of 0.99) is full membership; the rating of one (calibrated value 0.1) is full non-membership; and the rating of three (calibrated value 0.5) is the crossover point.

## **4. Results and discussion**

### **4.1 Analysis of necessary conditions**

Although the analysis of sufficient conditions is at the core of fsQCA, it should always be preceded by the identification of necessary conditions (Schneider & Wagemann, 2010). This study analyzes only one dependent variable, career intention (see Figure 1), as the outcome condition. The fsQCA analysis considers five antecedent conditions for the outcome return (aware, work, sos, ipc, pay). To identify whether any of the five conditions are necessary for career intention, the study analyzes whether the condition is always present (or absent) in all cases where the outcome is present (or absent) (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Therefore, career intention is achievable if the condition in question occurs. The degree to which the cases conform to this rule reflects “consistency.” A condition is “necessary” or “almost always necessary” when the corresponding consistency score exceeds the threshold of 0.9 or 0.8, respectively (Ragin, 2000). Table 2 presents the results

of the fsQCA test on the necessity of the conditions related to the career intention outcomes. The results show that work, ipc and pay are necessary conditions for career intention, whereas aware and soso are almost always necessary conditions for career intention.

Table 2  
The result of necessary condition analysis

Condition	Necessary conditions for the outcome	
	Consistency	Coverage
aware	0.859654	0.863596
~c_aware	0.514392	0.926310
work	0.937347	0.814429
~c_work	0.371765	0.929822
soso	0.895234	0.872164
~t_soso	-3.921400	1.000000
ipc	0.933769	0.842844
~c_ipc	0.393859	0.889331
pay	0.925574	0.836192
~c_pay	0.404180	0.910610

#### 4.2 Analysis of sufficient conditions

The analysis of sufficient conditions starts with the construction of a truth table (Ragin, 2008). The truth table has  $2^k$  rows ( $k$  = number of conditions), and each row in the table corresponds to a configuration of conditions. Based on the set membership cores, each observation is in a particular row. The study uses the fsQCA algorithm to produce the truth table for the outcomes, career intention. To reduce the truth tables to meaningful configurations, the study uses a frequency threshold of fifteen observations to exclude less important configurations (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). In addition, the QCA literature also recommends that at least 80 percent of the cases in the sample should remain after imposing the frequency restriction (Ragin, 2008). The frequency threshold ensures that 81 percent of the cases in the sample are part of the analyses for career intention. In the next step, to identify which configurations are sufficient for achieving the outcomes, the study applies a consistency threshold that is greater than or equal to 0.80 (Ragin, 2008) with a PRI score threshold that is greater than or equal to 0.67 to avoid simultaneous subset relations of attribute combinations in both the outcomes and their negations (Schneider & Wagemann, 2010). Further, when applying these threshold values, the fsQCA software provides three solutions: an intermediate solution, a parsimonious solution, and a complex solution. This study analyzes the intermediate solutions (Table 3 – 4) for the outcomes, as these solutions make no simplifying assumptions (Ragin, 2008). The consistency and coverage values for each complex solution and their respective configurations surpass the minimum acceptable values (Ragin, 2008).

### 4.3 Casual recipes for the career intention

The fsQCA results show that the configurations were sufficient to predict high and low scores in the study's outcomes, based on the calculation of the complex combination of five conditions, which are presented in Tables 3 – 4. Whilst Ragin (2006) suggests to forget the combination if the consistency is less than 0.75 (better close to 1). Further Ragin (2006) and Woodside and Zhang (2012) identified the coverage in between 0.2 – 0.6 as satisfactory. Accordingly, the results are informative. Ordanini et al. (2014) noted that recipes based on the combination of five conditions are more important than the outcome, i.e., career intention. According to the results, eight causal recipes described the condition of high career intention (coverage: 0.90, consistency: 0.86). Coverage and consistency in asymmetrical modeling, which are analogous to the coefficient of determination and the correlate/on in symmetrical modeling, respectively, are two probabilistic measures used to confirm the calculated recipes that are sufficient and consistent causal configurations. The cutoffs for coverage and consistency are 0.20 and 0.8, respectively (Ragin, 2008). As shown in Table 3 the high career intention in tourism industry was achieved when they provide high pay and benefits, high industry person congeniality, low social status and low awareness of the industry (M3). The second model (M5) indicated that low industry person congeniality, high social status, high nature of work, high awareness of the industry resulted in high career intention. The third model (M2) low industry person congeniality, low social status, high nature of work, high awareness of the industry resulted in high career intention. Additionally, M4 and M8 are also showing significant results.

Table 3  
Configural model for career intention

Casual models for high career intention	Raw Coverage	Unique Coverage	Consistency
A. ci = f(pay, ipc, soso, work, aware)			
M1: pay*ipc*work	0.859	0.059	0.891
M2: ~ipc*~soso*~work*aware	0.281	0.001	0.9443
M3: pay*ipc*~soso*~aware	0.395	0.000	0.9581
M4: ipc*~soso*work*aware	0.440	0.002	0.9335
M5: ~ipc*soso*work*aware	0.379	0.000	0.9452
M6: pay*ipc*soso*aware	0.781	0.009	0.926
M7: pay*work*aware	0.815	0.013	0.891
M8: pay*~ipc*~soso*aware	0.336	0.000	0.9384
<i>Solution coverage: 0.900368</i>			
<i>Solution consistency: 0.865965</i>			
<i>Frequency cutoff: 2.00</i>			
<i>Consistency cutoff: 0.93</i>			



#### 4.4 Casual recipes for the negation intention

This empirical study explored the causal recipes leading to low career intention (see ~ A in Table 4). These results are line with Kan, Adegbite, Omari, and Abdellatif (2016), who recognized fsQCA as a method for generating knowledge based on set theory. According to the fsQCA results, eight casual recipes explained low career intention (coverage: 0.82, consistency: 0.76). Model 1 (M1) indicated that low career intention resulted from low industry person congeniality, low social status, low nature of work and high awareness of the industry (Table 4). The second model (M6) proposed that high pay/benefits, low industry person congeniality, low social status and high awareness of the industry led to the low career intention of school students (Table 4).

Table 4  
Configural model for career intention (negation)

Casual models for high career intention	Raw Coverage	Unique Coverage	Consistency
~A. ~ci = f(pay, ipc, soso, work, aware)			
M1: ~ipc*~soso*~work*aware	0.499670	0.006498	0.9223011
M2: pay*ipc*~soso*~aware	0.636312	0.004897	0.848443
M3: ipc*~soso*work*aware	0.704398	0.003767	0.821617
M4: ~ipc*soso*work*aware	0.624353	0.004709	0.857364
M5: pay*ipc*soso*~work*aware	0.565966	0.019493	0.852845
M6: pay*~ipc*~soso*aware	0.589698	-0.000000	0.9066172
M7: pay*~soso*work*aware	0.711178	0.000659	0.823107
M8: pay*~ipc*work*aware	0.643940	-0.000000	0.858937
solution coverage: 0.823430	frequency cutoff: 2.000000		
solution consistency: 0.764737	consistency cutoff: 0.824577		

#### 5. Conclusion

This empirical study helps to enrich the understanding of school students' career intention of the tourism industry which has a considerable value for the development of the tourism industry in North Central province of Sri Lanka. Current study explored the factors affecting to the career intention of tourism and hospitality industry in North Central province of Sri Lanka using fsQCA models. Five factors including social status, industry person congeniality, pay and benefits, nature of the work, and awareness of the industry, were identified that are affecting students' career intention using the previous literature. Unlike the past studies conducted on career intention, the present study took place with the involvement of school students in Sri Lanka, who has no tourism academic background, which has not been previously studied in Sri Lanka.

The study examined the complexity of the attitudes among school students towards their career intention in the tourism industry by using asymmetrical modeling (i.e., fsQCA).

The complex configurations of attitudes towards the tourism careers were used to explore the causal conditions for simulating both high and low career intentions. This study is among the first to predict causal recipes, based on attitudes, leading to the decisions on career intention. The fsQCA results supported the six tenets of complexity theory. The results of the calculated causal models could provide practical guidelines to understand students' attitudes towards the career intention based on the calculated sufficient configurations that lead to desirable and undesirable outcomes that affect the tourism industry in the near future. Accordingly, combination of high pay / benefits, high industry person congeniality, low social status and low awareness of the industry are key factors affecting the career intention in the tourism industry.

The results have important implications for policy makers and practitioners since attracting and retaining qualified employees is a challenge with the high inter-industrial competition. In order to increase the school students' career intention in tourism industry, both the authorities and potential employers should increase their awareness on pay and benefits that includes, free hotel stays, foreign tours, ability to earn a lot of money and ability to make lot of foreign friends. Further, high awareness of nature of work influence high career intention. Thus, it is important to communicate the information regarding interesting nature of the tourism job one's industry person congeniality matters. Therefore, the students should be assisted to identify their personality, skills, and what the industry expected of them that includes dedication and commitment. Further, it is recommended to inculcate tourism subjects in the school curricular which gives an opportunity for the school students to grasp a broader understanding of the tourism discipline. Additionally, the authorities should look at promoting tourism education among school students through island wide awareness programs and campaigns, establishing tourism societies at the school levels, essay, debate and poster competitions etc. It is also important to educate and train the school teachers about the importance of the tourism industry, through them, students' attitude towards the tourism careers could be enhanced.

The present study recommends the future researchers to use a larger sample that covers a wider geographical area, to use complexity theory in data analyzing using both fsQCA and structural equation modeling (SEM) to increase the richness of the findings of this nature of studies.

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## **Capital structure approaches and firm return: A comparative analysis of banking and insurance companies listed in the Colombo Stock Exchange of Sri Lanka**

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### ***Abstract***

*Financing decisions are one of the most critical areas under the purview of financial managers. These decisions have direct impact on capital structure approaches and firm return. Capital structure decisions affect the firm's cost of capital, capital budgeting decisions and firm value. It has always been an area for researchers to understand the relationship between capital structure approaches and firm return. This paper investigates the impact of capital structure approaches on firm return based on data obtained from nineteen (19) listed banking and insurance companies in the Colombo Stock Exchange for the period spanning from year 2009 to 2017. The study measures the firm return in terms of return on assets and return on equity whereas capital structure approaches are measured in terms of Aggressive Capital Structure Investment Policy and Aggressive Capital Structure Financing Policy. The result indicates that most of listed banking firms and insurance firms adopt aggressive capital structure financing policy in their capital structure decisions. It is important to note that Sri Lankan listed banking and insurance companies prefer to use high volume of liquid assets to control the corporate finance in order to maximize the firm return. The result further reveals that Aggressive Capital Structure Investment Policy affects positively to the return on assets and Aggressive Capital Structure Financing Policy affects negatively to the return on equity of both banking and insurance companies in Sri Lanka. Finally, this research confirmed the fact that banks are highly utilizing the debt capital funds than equity capital funds. Therefore, the financial managers of both banking and insurance companies should make trustful and risky decisions as they use more debt funds in order to deploy the firms' financial resources as well as to*

*maximize the profitability which would ultimately affect to increase shareholders wealth subsequently firm value.*

**Keywords:** *Capital structure approaches, firm return, listed banking companies, listed insurance companies.*

## **1. Introduction**

Capital refers to the means of funding to a business, whether a business is newly born or it is an ongoing. A firm requires funds to carry out its activities as no success is achievable in the absence of fund. The needed fund may be for short term or long run by means of daily running or business expansions. This means how important or essential fund is in the life of a business. Capital of firms when sourced, it becomes a burden on enterprises simply because it is other persons' resources which they are to compensate as they deriving maximum benefits from it as a symbol of a company's financial liabilities (Chechet & Olayiwola, 2014). This study examines the relationship among the components of financing (equity capital and debt capital) and financial performance in the listed financial companies of the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) in Sri Lanka. The motivation behind this research is recognizing that in the process of their financial decision-making, all the listed companies must adhere in controlling the selection of optimal capital structure mix. These companies should disclose the information on capital structure decisions and its impacts for the financial performance of such companies and those would helpful the management as well as investors in the deployment of financial resources to ensure that they are aggressive or conservative. In addition, the financial managers of such firms would make the capital structure decisions within a particular policy framework and would adhere the suitable capital structure mix which is at optimal in order to maximize the firm's value as well as its shareholders wealth. In the existing literature, many researchers have emphasized the effects of capital structure to financial performance and those indicate the relationships among the financial performance variables.

Given the importance of the capital structure into firm performance, the financial managers should purely consider taking optimal capital structure decisions in order to achieve the business results thereby maximizing the profitability of the firm. Therefore, it is vehemently emphasized that financing decisions are one of the most critical areas for finance managers and those decisions would have to be taken within a prescribed policy framework. The impact of such decisions has a direct impact on capital structure and firm financial performance. Hence, this topic has always been an area for interest of researchers to understand the relationship between capital structure and financial performance. Though, the discussion on capital structure approaches and firm return is a less researching area of the field of finance and the availability empirical researches or studies performed on this theme is a vacuum in Sri Lankan context. Therefore, this study aims to find the relationship between capital structure approaches and firm return and thereby to fill the gap in literature in Sri Lankan context. The lack of critical information



about appropriate mix of capital structure is one of major challenges for companies to make their decisions better. The contribution of this study to the extant literature would provide the indicator of finding the level of capital structure position in terms of the reporting, managing, an appropriate mix and performance of capital structure components. Even though, the banking, finance and insurance sector is a deterministic and dependable business sector for the other business sectors in any country

## **2. Literature review**

Capital structure is one of the most puzzling issues in corporate finance literature (Velnampy & Niresh, 2012; Brounen & Eichholtz, 2001). This is a general combination of debt and equity that composites the total capital of firms. The proportion of debt to equity is a strategic choice of corporate managers (Velnampy & Niresh, 2012). Capital structure decision can be considered as an utmost since the profitability of an enterprise is directly affected by such decision. The financial managers of firms should keep greater attention in time on determining capital structure decision. The capital is a vital part of the balance sheet as it represents all kinds of assets, liabilities and capital. The term “capital structure” of an enterprise is a combination of equity shares, preference shares and long-term debts. Also, the financial managers should give an utmost care in case of the optimum capital structure is concerned. The firms have to be systematically formulated the capital structure mix unless they may fail to economize the use of their funds. As a result, it is being increasingly realized that a company should plan its capital structure to maximize the use of funds and to be able to adapt more easily to the changing conditions in order to achieve the firms goals and objectives. The relationship between capital structure and profitability has been the subject of remarkable milestone over the past decade throughout the irrelevance theory. In the seminal article, presented by Miller and Modigliani (1958), irrelevance theory, they argued that capital structure is unrelated to firm’s value. In the presence of corporate income tax and the cost of capital in Miller and Modigliani (1963) they argued that the market value of the firm is positively related to the amount of long term debt used in its capital structure. The relationship between capital structure and firm financial performance is one that received considerable attention in the finance literature.

Companies have to remain vital in current hypercompetitive environments. Companies have to rethink their organization and their flexibility to adapt themselves to new business situations (Volderba, 1996). Accordingly, this has always been an area for interest for researchers to understand the relationship between capital structure and financial performance due to the thorough understanding on financial accounting and reporting by companies. Researchers have proposed various models to establish the relationship between capital structure on financial performance (Prahalthan, 2011; Pratheepkanth, 2011; Nimalathan & Valeriu, 2010). However, there is no agreement among the researcher about the optimal mix of capital structure as well as the indication of capital

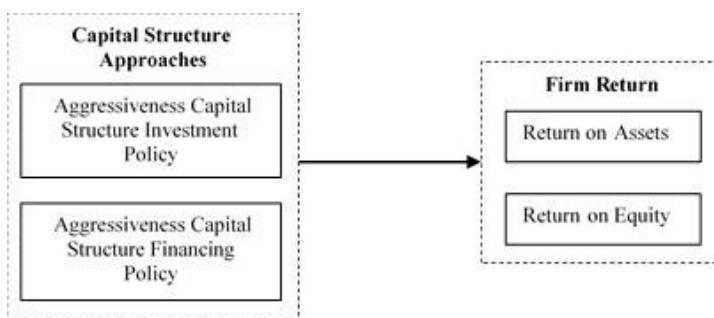
structure policy (aggressiveness or conservativeness) to achieve organizational effectiveness in terms of profitability.

Modigliani and Miller (1958) theorem suggested that firms in a given risk class would have the same applicable discount rate, differing based on “scale factor” only and would be unaffected by financial gearing (Weston & Copeland, 1998). However, the arguments made by Brigham and Gapenski (1996), an optimal capital structure can be attained if there exist a tax sheltering benefits provided an increase in debt level is equal to the bankruptcy costs. They further indicated that the manager of the firm should be able to identify optimal capital structure and to maintain it at desired level. This is the point at which the financing costs and the cost of capital are minimized, thereby increasing financial performance of a firm.

According to Onaolapo and Kojola (2010) conducted a study by selecting thirty listed non- financial firms in Nigeria for the period 2001 – 2007. They found a negative relationship between asset tangibility and Return on Assets (ROA) and conclude that there is a negative relationship between capital structure and financial performance of the firms. The implication of this is that the sampled firms were not able to utilize the fixed asset composition of their total assets judiciously to impact positively on their firm performance. However, it provides evidence that asset tangibility is a major determinant of firm performance. Meanwhile, Saeedi and Mahmoodi (2011) revealed that there is a negative relationship between capital structure and ROA and there is no significant relationship between Return on Equity (ROE) and capital structure. Altogether, this study provides evidence that capital structure is positively or even negatively related to firm performance. The research was conducted by selecting a sample of 320 listed companies in the Tehran Stock Exchange over the period 2002-2009. Gupta, Srivastava and Sharma (2007) in their research on capital structure and financial performance by selecting 100 companies listed on National Stock Exchange of India from 2006-2010 strongly pointed out that the financing decisions are one of the most critical areas for firms’ finance managers. They found that the capital structure influences financial performance. The significance of the influence of capital structure on performance is respectively belonged to measures of adjusted value, market value and book value. Also, a study conducted focusing Lithuanian food and beverages companies over the period 2005- 2010 confirmed that the selected indicators such as return on capital, return on equity, return on assets, earning per share, operating profit margin and net profit margin are negatively correlated with the companies’ financial performance (Norvaisiene & Stankeviciene, 2012). They also concluded that the firms’ efficiency is related to debt level to a large extent. Moreover, the capital structure is to be arranged to maintain in an appropriate manner so that firm should give priorities associated with the implementation of fast-track, profitable businesses, that would allow these companies to ensure the growth of performance efficiency. Moreover, Pratheepkanth (2011) found that the capital structure is most significant discipline of company’s operations in his research by selecting 30 listed companies of the CSE from 2005 to 2009. The results indicated that the relationship between the capital structure (debt to equity) and financial performance (gross profit, net profit, ROA, and ROI/ROCE) is negative. The literature shows that capital structure

strongly affects to maximize firms' operational performance so that decision makers pay much more attention to the financing activities that exert potential and strong impact on their operating performance.

Based on the above literature, the following conceptual model (Figure 1) is formulated to illustrate the relationship between the capital structure approaches and firm return.



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework

According to the above conceptual model, the capital structure policy is the independent variable, which is represented by the aggressive capital structure investment policy and aggressive capital structure financing policy. The firm return is the dependent variable which is represented by ROA and ROE. Accordingly, the main hypotheses derived to be tested in this study are as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is positive relationship between ACSIP and ROA

H<sub>2</sub>: There is positive relationship between ACSFP and ROA

H<sub>3</sub>: There is positive relationship between ACSIP and ROE

H<sub>4</sub>: There is positive relationship between ACSFP and ROE

### **3. Methodology**

The scope of the study is listed banking and insurance companies in the CSE of Sri Lanka. The researcher conducted the comparative analysis by using these two parallel categories. Nineteen (19) companies were selected from banking and insurance sector using purposive sampling method. In order to meet the objectives of the study, data were collected from secondary sources mainly from the audited financial statements included in the annual reports of the selected companies, which were published by the CSE. Specifically, the financial statements of the sampled firms were collected for the period of nine years ending with 2017.

Two approaches are defined using aggressiveness and conservativeness of the firms in deciding their capital structure. Aggressive Capital Structure Investment Policy (ACSIP) results in minimal level of investment in fixed assets versus total assets. In contrast,

Aggressive Capital Structure Financing Policy (ACSFP) places a greater proportion of capital in durable assets with the opportunity cost of lesser profitability. In order to measure the degree of aggressiveness, following ratio was used. A lower ratio means a relatively aggressive policy while a higher ratio means a relatively conservative policy.

$$\text{Degree of aggressiveness} = \text{Total Fixed Assets (TFA)} / \text{Total Assets (TA)}$$

ACSFP utilizes higher levels of total debts. In contrast, a conservative financing policy uses more debt than equity capital. The degree of aggressiveness of a financing policy adopted by a firm is measured as follows. A higher ratio means a relatively aggressive policy while lower ratio means a relatively conservative policy.

$$\text{Degree of aggressiveness} = \text{Total Debts (TD)} / \text{Total Assets (TA)}$$

The impact of capital structure policies on the firm’s return was analyzed through frequently used profitability measures i.e. ROA and ROE by running multiple regression analysis. The performance variables ROA and ROE as well as the TFA/TA and TD/TA are averaged for the period. The regression models used in the estimation are;

$$\text{ROA}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{TFA/TA}_i) + \beta_2 (\text{TD/TA}_i) + \varepsilon \dots\dots (i)$$

$$\text{ROE}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{TFA/TA}_i) + \beta_2 (\text{TD/TA}_i) + \varepsilon \dots\dots (ii)$$

#### 4. Results and discussion

The descriptive statistics show (see Table 1) that over the period under review, the firm returns in banking firms measured by return on assets and return on equity averaged are 175.77 percent and 2786.18 percent respectively. The aggressive capital structure investment policy is reported as 11.87 percent and aggressive capital structure financing policy is averaged to 86.73 percent. This is an indication that approximately 87 percent of listed banking firms in Sri Lanka are adopted aggressive capital structure financing policy, confirming the fact that banks are highly utilizing the debt capital than equity capital.

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Banking firms		Insurance firms	
	Mean (%)	Standard deviation	Mean (%)	Standard deviation
ACSIP	11.87	0.11408	17.27	0.10011
ACSFP	86.73	0.10048	82.26	0.10059
ROA	175.77	1.67894	253.24	3.62882
ROE	2786.18	43.73784	1780.01	26.50726

In the same period under review, the firm returns in insurance firms measured by return on assets and return on equity are averaged to 253.24 percent and 1780.01 percent respectively. The aggressive capital structure investment policy is reported as 17.27 percent and aggressive capital structure financing policy is averaged to 82.26 percent.

This is an indication that approximately 82 percent of listed insurance firms in Sri Lanka adopted aggressive capital structure financing policy, confirming the fact that insurance firms are highly utilizing the debt capital funds than equity capital funds.

In addition, all Sri Lankan listed banking and insurance firms have not adopted aggressive capital structure investment policy stating that they do not invest funds in a higher portion of fixed assets of their total assets and conventionally they prefer to use high liquid assets in order to secure the liquidity which would be affected to gain the optimal profits.

Table 2  
Result of correlation analysis

Industry	Variable	Corr. & Sig.	Firm return	
			ROA	ROE
Banking	ACSIP	Corr.	0.477**	0.312
		Sig.	0.000	0.231
	ACSFP	Corr.	-0.178	-0.143*
		Sig.	0.214	0.018
Insurance	ACSIP	Corr.	0.350*	-0.255
		Sig.	0.046	0.088
	ACSFP	Corr.	-0.086	-0.331*
		Sig.	0.479	0.019

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

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

Table 2 shows the result for the relationship between capital structure policies and firm return. The result indicates that there is a positive relationship between ACSIP and ROA in listed banking firms as well as listed insurance firms. On the other hand, the relationship between ACSIP and ROE of listed banking firms is negative and significant, a similar relationship can also be seen in ACSIP and ROE of listed insurance firms. According to these results, it is important to note that Sri Lankan listed banking and insurance firms prefer to use high volume of liquid assets for controlling the corporate finance in order to maximize the firm return. The result further reveals that the association of ACSFP and ROA in listed banking firms and insurance firms is negative but insignificant. This implies that these firms prefer to use more long term debts than equity funds in order to fulfill their corporate financial needs for the purpose of implementing their operations.

It is a clear indication that the ACSIP and ACSFP are significantly associated with the firm returns. If the banking and insurance firms increasingly adopt the aggressive capital structure investment policy in their capital structure decision making the value of ROA would be increased and vice versa. Also, higher the adopting of ACSFP in these firms for their same decision-making, lower the value of ROE and vice versa.

Regression analysis was used to test the effect of capital structure approaches on firm returns. Results are shown in Table 3. With regard to the banking firms, the result indicates that ACSIP has a positive effect on ROA and ACSFP has no any significant

effect on ROA. On other hand, ACSFP is only policy which has a negative effect on ROE. Therefore, aggressive capital structure investment policy increases the return on assets while aggressive capital structure financing policy is deteriorating the return on equity of banking firms.

In contrast, effects of these policies on ROA and ROE of the insurance firms are completely matching. In fact, aggressive capital structure investment policy helps insurance firms to increase the return on assets while aggressive capital structure financing would have adverse effect on the return on equity.

Table 3  
Regression results

Predictor	Unstandardized $\beta$			
	Banking firms		Insurance firm	
	ROA	ROE	ROA	ROE
(Constant)	11.382**	98.104	3.894	300.559**
ACSIP	0.246*	-15.758	1.285*	12.229
ACSFP	-11.130	-59.676**	-1.923	-28.192**
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.465	0.426	0.389	0.412
F (sig)	23.24 (0.001)	18.25 (0.012)	34.25 (0.000)	29.34 (0.000)

\*\* Regression coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Regression coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

## 5. Conclusion

This study explores the effect of capital structure investment and financing policies on firm return across Sri Lankan listed banking and insurance companies. The study found that the Sri Lankan banking and insurance firms likely to invest lower amount on their fixed assets than liquid assets as well as to finance lower amount of their own funds in fixed assets than liquid assets. In fact, most of listed banking and insurance firms tend to adopt aggressive capital structure financing policy in their capital structure decisions. It is also important to note that Sri Lankan listed banking and insurance companies prefer to use high volume liquid assets to control the corporate finance in order to maximize the firm return. Therefore, aggressive capital structure investment approach would help enhance the firm return by maintain high level liquidity. The findings of the study suggest that the financial professionals and decision makers should make timely and accurate corporate financial decisions and deployment of financial resources to ensure the soundness and viability of the capital structure decisions in order to maximize the firm return.

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## **Use of learning management systems by the undergraduates in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka**

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### ***Abstract***

*Learning management system is a widely used technique by educational institutes to provide online learning and teaching support for students and teachers. Although students tend to use many e-resources, use of learning management system is evidently low. This study aims to identify the factors that effect on use of leaning management system by undergraduates in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. A sample of 150 students was selected for the study using purposive sampling technique and a structured questionnaire was used in data collection. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis were used in the data analysis. The result reveals that the lecturer support, students commitment and perceived usefulness have a significant effect on use of learning management system by the undergraduates in the university. The university should take initiatives to encourage academic staff for delivering lectures and conducting assessments through the university learning management system. Future studies could validate the findings of the present study using a larger sample representing other universities in the system.*

**Keywords:** *ICT infrastructure, learning management system, lecturer support, perceived usefulness, student commitment.*

### **1. Introduction**

Learning Management System (LMS) is one of the knowledge management tools that supports e-learning. LMS can be used to organize and provide access to online learning services for students, teachers and administrators (Ardito et al., 2006). Through LMS, users can plan, implement and assess specific learning activities in an e-learning environment (Hayashi, Chen, Ryan, & Wu, 2004). The e-learning is a process where learning can be done at anytime and anywhere using computers or similar devices. However, e-learning is commonly referred to the intentional use of networked ICT in

teaching and learning (Ambika & Kavitha, 2014). A number of terms has been used to describe this mode of teaching such as web-based learning, virtual learning, distributed learning etc., and all these terms are referred to as educational processes in an online environment that utilize a learning portal to mediate in teaching and learning activities (Ayub, Khalid, Tariq, Elahi, & Nadeem, 2012).

Mosahab, Mahamad, and Ramayah (2010) found that many colleges are using LMS for e-learning courses, but many instructors restrict themselves to uploading course materials to the course website or made late to upload and never use the interactive features such as chat, discussion forum, email, messages on LMS environment. Some instructors may use the discussion board to generate class discussion among students and themselves nevertheless the lack of immediate feedback with the discussion board in LMS has discouraged users to utilize them (Adzharuddin & Ling, 2013).

It is seemed to be a gap exists between the reality and the many advanced teaching tools that are provided in LMS, such as multimedia materials, which were considered as possible means for enhancing teaching, but are not utilized. LMS system is used more adaptive and customizable manner. This is also to support teachers or instructors with different computer level skills (Almarashdeh, Sahari, Zin, & Alsmadi, 2010). Therefore, some students who lack the computer skills are automatically reluctant to the use of university LMS portal. Although many interactive features are available in the LMS, its capacity for using may still be limited because of its demand on the commitments from both instructor and students during a specific time frame (Adzharuddin & Ling, 2013). Therefore, this study investigates why many of the students of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) are not using the university LMS for their educational activities.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews literature deals with factors associating the use of LMS. Third section of the paper describes the materials and methods used in the study. Fourth section presents the results and discussion. Final section concludes the study with recommendations, limitations and avenues for the future works.

## **2. Literature review**

LMS is a software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement and assess a specific learning process. Typically, LMS provides an instructor with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance online. The LMS may also provide students with the ability to use interactive features such as threaded discussions, video conferencing, and discussion forums. LMS is also called Course Management System (CMS) (Alias & Zainuddin, 2005).

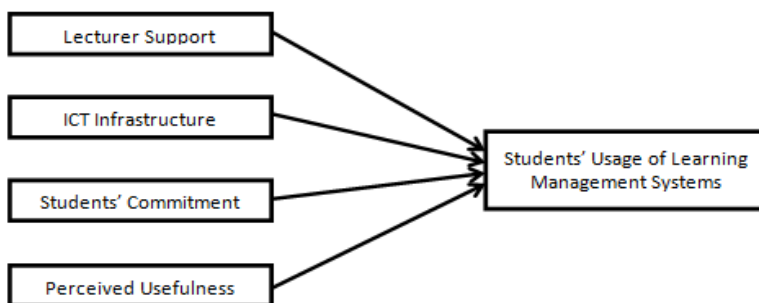
According to Shonola and Mike (2014) one of barrier to implement LMS is perception of inadequate lecturer support. Similarly, teachers' resistance to change has also been cited as a personal factor that impinges e-learning adoption (Suraweera, 2011). Mahoney (2008) refers it as a culture of resistance, where teachers accustomed to traditional modes of instruction and refuse to change. Teachers are reluctant to put their courses into an electronic format and in some occasions, they prefer the traditional methods despite having access to newer technologies (Nasser, Cherif & Romanowski, 2011).

According to investigation of Kisanga and Ireson (2015), another major constraint to LMS based learning in Nigeria is lack of infrastructure. Similarly, developing and sustaining a reliable and productive LMS depends on the provision of proper LMS infrastructure that includes hardware, software and good connectivity, all of which constitute a barrier to LMS in higher educational bodies. This result is in line with the studies of Ozkan, Koseler, and Baykal, (2008) and Shonola and Mike, (2014) in which the authors believe that lack of infrastructure is one of the barriers that influence the use of technology in education.

The reason for preparation of LMS based learning without motivation is attitude because it gives additional workload in classroom teaching (Bowen et al., 2012). Similarly, some mature students are also not willing to embrace technology when learning as they are mainly studying for promotion at work rather than skill acquisition. This result is consistent with that obtained on a previous study on e-learning in which the author stated that a lukewarm attitude on the side of the students in the e-learning processes is a challenge to successful implementation of LMS. Shonola and Mike, (2014) found that interactive digital technologies in Southwest Nigerian universities being impeded by lack of motivation for the faculty members.

According to Munasinghe and Wijewardana (2016), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use have significant effects on the attitude towards use of LMS. Also, the study confirms that the students have positive attitudes towards use of the LMS. Therefore, university should create an e-learning culture through use of LMS by providing useful content with ease of access to the students. Chen (2009) discussed an assessment model that includes primary criteria and sub-criteria in order to evaluate the usefulness of an e-learning system. The e-learning material focuses on quality and contents such as easiness, structure, contents and interaction. The quality of web learning platform focuses on quality of web connection and learning platform.

Based on the above literature review the study is focused to identify the reasons for lack of the use of LMS among undergraduates in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Lecturer support, ICT infrastructure, students' commitment, and perceived usefulness are considered as independent variables and the students' usage of LMS is considered as dependent variable. Further, the study focuses the following research model (Figure 1) with the four hypotheses.



**Figure 1** Research model

## Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive effect of lecturer support to students' use of LMS in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive effect of ICT infrastructure to students' use of LMS in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive effect of students' commitment to students' use of LMS in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive effect of perceived usefulness to students' use of LMS in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.

## 3. Methodology

A structured questionnaire was developed and primary data were collected from 150 undergraduates from four faculties of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka namely Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Management Studies and the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. First part of the questionnaire was devoted for the demographic information and second part of the questionnaire was reserved for measuring the key variables of the study. In fact, items on Likert type five scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) were used. Cronbach's Alpha test was used to measure the internal consistency of these constructs. Values reported well over the general cutoff (0.7) ensure the reliability of the constructs. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were used to identify the relationships among the variables and to test the hypotheses. Demographic factors were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## 4. Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of independent and dependent variables. Almost all the mean values of the variables are above 3 and moderately high. These values indicate that lecturer support, ICT infrastructure, students' commitment and perceived usefulness are modest. Moreover, average of LMS usage indicates lack of LMS usage by the students. Statistics for standard deviation and skewness signify that there is no more deviation among the respondents on these variables.

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics for research variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
			Statistic	Std. Error
Lecturer Support	3.475	0.668	0.214	0.123
ICT Infrastructure	3.393	0.745	-0.023	0.142
Student Commitment	3.145	0.692	-0.231	0.123
Perceived Usefulness	3.562	0.760	0.147	0.154
LMS Usage	3.438	0.980	-0.446	0.111

Table 2 presents the result of correlation analysis. The result indicates that lecturer support, ICT infrastructure, student commitment, perceived usefulness are positively correlated with use of LMS. This result signifies that these factors are very important in encouraging students for use of LMS.

Table 2  
Result of correlation analysis

Variable	A	B	C	D
A. Lecturer support	-			
B. ICT infrastructure	0.657**	-		
C. Student commitment	0.163*	.175*	-	
D. Perceived usefulness	0.187*	0.220**	0.543**	-
E. Usage of LMS	0.462**	.424**	.506**	.664**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 reproduces the result of regression analysis. Adj. R Square and F –test reveal the fact that regression model is well fitted to the data and suited to predict the behavior of use of LMS through predictors of lecturer support, IT infrastructure, student commitment and perceived usefulness. The VIF values are also indicating that there is no any suspect for multicollinearity among the predictor variables. Regression coefficients also imply that lecturer support, student commitment and perceived usefulness have positive and significant influence over student use of LMS. However, IT infrastructure does not show any significant influence over student use of LMS.

Table 3  
Result of regression analysis

Variable	$\beta$	Standard error	t-value	Sig	VIF
(Constant)	-1.470	0.360	4.081	0.000	--
Lecturer support	0.396	0.104	3.810	0.000	1.726
IT infrastructure	0.141	0.094	1.504	0.135	1.751
Student commitment	0.284	0.094	2.746	0.002	1.020
Perceived usefulness	0.638	0.083	7.704	0.000	1.012
Adj. R Square = 0.576		F = 51.668		Sig F = 0.000	

Results of correlation and regression analysis support only for H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> indicating that lecturer support is necessarily important to encourage students to use of LMS for their learning activities. This result is consistent to the findings of a study conducted by Shonola and Mike (2014). Student commitment is also found as a significant factor which determines the student use of LMS. Adzharuddin and Ling (2013) also stated that although many interactive features are available in the LMS, its capacity for use may still be limited because of its demand on the commitments from both instructors and students during a specific time frame. Similar to Munasinghe and Wijewardana (2016), this study also found perceived usefulness as a key determinant of the use of LMS by the students. On the contrary, this study does not support the view that ICT infrastructure including

availability of ICT, organizational support, organizational readiness, and top management support are closely related to behavioral intentions to use LMS in teaching and learning.

## 5. Conclusion

This study found that lecturer support, student's commitment, perceived usefulness are key factors that determine the use of University LMS by the undergraduates of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Moreover, the result reveals that the students commitment toward to use of University LMS is being at a low level. Even though literature supports the lack ICT infrastructure facilities may affect to reduce the use of LMS, the present study shows that ICT infrastructure does not make any significant influence on use of LMS by the undergraduates of Rajarata University Sri Lanka. Administrators of the University should take initiatives to encourage the lecturers and students for effective use of University LMS in their teaching, learning and assessments process. This study was solely based on the data collected from the undergraduates of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Thus, future studies should validate the findings of the present study using a larger sample representing other universities in the system.

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## **Facilitating ESL academic lecture comprehension through metacognitive strategy instruction: A study of undergraduates in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper reports the findings of a study based on an ongoing research which investigates the effects of facilitating English as a Second Language academic lecture comprehension through metacognitive strategy instruction of the undergraduates in a Sri Lankan university. Comprehension of academic lectures conducted in English has been a daunting task for university students mainly due to two reasons; transition from medium of first language to second language and poor state of listening and comprehension skills in English language. The study involved 73 students studying in the Faculty of Management Studies of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. A questionnaire was used as the tool for the initial survey to gauge the knowledge of existing metacognitive listening skills while a training in metacognitive strategy instruction in listening was the major study. The results indicated that the selected students had a poor knowledge of metacognitive strategies in the initial survey. In the major study, it was proved that metacognitive strategy training could boost English as a Second Language academic lecture comprehension.*

**Keywords:** *Academic lecture comprehension, English as a second language (ESL), metacognitive strategy instruction.*

### **1. Introduction**

The demand for English medium education in the Asian countries and other developing countries has shown a dramatic increase due to the globalization of Education. It has been pointed out that as a result of the increasing number of second language (L2) English speakers or speakers of English as a foreign language attending universities of English

speaking countries, there is a demand for study programs conducted in English in the higher education sector. English medium education in the Sri Lankan universities has been considered important by most of the faculties due to the world trends in education, the advent of information and communication technology (ICT) and the vast private-sector oriented employment opportunities that resulted in, since the introduction of liberalized economic policies of the late 1970s. However, preparing students for English medium education is a major challenge for universities and the higher educational institutes despite the English language programs such as intensive programs and semester level English as a second language (ESL) courses conducted. This phenomenon is apparent in both local and foreign contexts where the student population belongs to the categories of L2 English speakers or speakers of English as a foreign language.

It is obvious that in the Sri Lankan context, the students are selected to universities and higher educational institutes based on the results of the G.C.E (A/L) examination or similar examinations and in some cases based on the G.C.E. (O/L) qualifications. Since, school education up to G.C.E (A/L) examination is done mostly through first language (L1) of the students, transforming to English medium education in the universities and the higher educational institutes has been a difficulty for students in the universities.

The poor attainment levels of the undergraduates' English language proficiency have been felt as an obstacle in the national universities in Sri Lanka to conduct study programs in L2 and prepare them for the competitive job market with necessary English language skills. In order to remedy this situation, it was felt as a need to start ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs in universities. Hence, English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) were established in all the national universities in Sri Lanka by the University Grants Commission in 1983 in order to improve the English language proficiency of the undergraduates to engage in courses conducted in English language which is L2. Further, comprehension of lectures conducted in L2 is a crucial factor for most of the university students due to various reasons such as poor level of English knowledge gained during the school education, limited access to English language in the home and social environment and the emphasis not placed on oral skills in the national education system.

In higher education, lecturing is a common format used for delivering information in academic contexts. Comprehension of lectures conducted in L2 is crucial for most of the university students as during the G.C.E. (A/L), majority of students study their subjects in L1. In the L1 context, note taking is the habitual action of students attending lectures. It is the practice of second language students to resort this same strategy when they face the task of listening to a lecture given in the L2. The linguistic features such as pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, lexical, and phonological areas in the L2 context also matter in the comprehension process of lectures compared to the same in L1 context. Listening is a major skill involved in the process of lecture comprehension and majority of EFL students find it difficult to comprehend lectures and to take down notes as listening is a cognitive skill and it has its own characteristics and also the students are not familiar with sub skills of listening in the L2 context. As Flowerdew (1994) points out, the unique characteristics

of listening skill are a matter that demands pressures upon listeners. Researchers of second language learning have proposed that use of learning strategies by L2 learners correlate with success in L2 learning (Oxford & Cohen, 1992) and the studies on listening strategies used by L2 learners provide evidence of remarkable improvement in the listening skill (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Vandergrift, 1996).

In a university or higher education sector, lecturing is the prominently used mode of dissemination of knowledge in the classroom. Therefore, academic lecture comprehension is a pivotal function in the classroom. In academic lecture comprehension, whether it is lectures conducted in L1 or L2, listening is the language skill which is directly involved in facilitating lecture comprehension. It is obvious that ESL students with low levels of competency in listening skill may find it difficult to listen, comprehend and take down notes of lectures conducted in L2. Hence, experts in the field of education believe that research needed to be done to enable more effective classroom teaching of the listening skill (Anderson & Lynch, 1998; Mendelsohn, 1998; Vandergrift, 2004). The concept of application of language strategies, developed from cognitive psychology, has been pointed out as a remedy to facilitate language skills and research so far has proved it to be more effective (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Goh, 2008; Rubin, 1994).

The core area of strategy instruction is the concept of metacognition introduced in cognitive psychology. Metacognition is a process in which the learner is actively monitoring, controlling and arranging the cognitive process in order to attain cognitive goals. According to Anderson (1991), metacognitive strategies are considered the most essential ones in developing learners' language skills. Further, studies have proved the fact that listening is a much more complex process than it appears despite the inadequate focus paid initially (Lynch, 2002; Brown & Yule, 1983; Vandergrift, 2004). Learning strategies enhances second language acquisition and studies done by Bacon (1992) and Vandergrift (1997) have proved that use of metacognitive strategies in ESL listening has been effective.

The L1 of the student population of the Sri Lankan universities is either Sinhala or Tamil and the students mostly belong to the middle or lower social classes of the society in which the exposure to English is minimal in the social and the family environments. Further, most of the students have studied in under-privileged schools that had less opportunities, resources, conducive environments and motivation for improving English. Since the English language qualifications gained at the G.C.E. (O/L) and G.C.E. (A/L) examinations are not considered for university entrance, students also pay less attention to learning English than they do to other major subjects. Moreover, even if students gain qualifications in English at national examinations such as the G.C.E. (O/L) and G.C.E. (A/L), they do not reflect the oral competency of the candidates which includes listening and speaking as the focus of evaluation is limited to reading and writing skills in such examinations. Therefore, the drastic transition in the medium of instruction from L1 to L2 in the university system is a challenge for students, particularly in the areas of speaking

and listening which subsequently affect academic lecture comprehension of lectures conducted in English language (L2).

The purpose of the first stage of this study was to ascertain whether the students possess and use listening strategies, particularly metacognitive strategies, in the comprehension of lectures conducted in L2. The study was based on the assumption that the students did not initially have a knowledge of listening strategies and they do not use listening strategies to overcome the difficulties faced during lectures conducted in English medium. In the second stage, it was tested whether training in metacognitive strategies could boost ESL academic lecture comprehension.

## **2. Literature review**

Over the past decade or so, listening comprehension strategy has become one of the most important topics in second language acquisition research. Researchers, such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Vandergrift (1997), along with many others, have examined a wide variety of issues related to L2 listening strategies. Most of the discussions have focused on differences between more and less effective listeners, listening strategy instruction, and assessment of listening strategies. The effectiveness of explicit teaching listening strategy on improving learners' listening proficiency has been proven across a range of settings (e.g., O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Ozeki, 2000 ; Carrier, 2003; Clement, 2007).

Studies in the second language learning have identified that the use of learning strategies- the techniques or procedures that facilitate a learning task by the learners, can exert a potential effect on achievement and performance in second/foreign language learning. Learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from a concern for identifying the characteristics of good language learners and the research efforts concentrating on the "good language learner" (Rubin, 1975; Naiman, 1975). They identified that strategies reported by students or observed in learning situations appeared to contribute to learning. The main factors that affect how well students learn a second language are language learning 'styles' and 'strategies' (Oxford, 2003). Learning styles are general approaches that students use in acquiring a new language while learning strategies are defined as specific actions, steps, or techniques used by students to enhance their own learning (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

The description of the strategies used by successful language learners provided a stimulus for further research into the establishment of taxonomies of language learning strategies. As a result, researchers such as O'Malley et al. (1985) have divided language learning strategies into three main subcategories. They are; metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies are the strategies that require planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is completed. Among the main metacognitive strategies, it is possible to include advance organizers, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, functional

planning, self-monitoring, delayed production, and self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself. Repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note taking, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory representation, key word, contextualization, elaboration, transfer, and inference are among the most important cognitive strategies. As to the socio-affective strategies, it can be stated that they are related to social-mediating activity and transacting with others. Cooperation and question for clarification are the main socio-affective strategies.

Therefore, language learning strategies and accompanying classification schemes grounded in cognitive theory, learning strategies have been differentiated and categorized into three main types: metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. These three types of learning strategies form the bases for research in language learning strategies in second language acquisition (O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990). In the case of metacognitive strategies, they help to oversee, regulate, or direct the language learning process and thus include planning, monitoring and evaluating. Cognitive strategies manipulate the material to be learnt or apply a specific technique to the learning task, while socio-affective strategies help learners to cooperate with classmates, question the teacher for clarification or apply specific techniques to lower their anxiety level.

One of the most important ways which may help learners overcome their problems in listening skill and facilitate listening comprehension is to guide them in employing the right tool- to use listening strategies effectively to compensate for breakdowns. Graham (2006) points out that problems of learners with listening include poor monitoring and understanding, poor application of background knowledge to help overcome problems of comprehension, problems in speech segmentation and recognizing familiar vocabulary in the speech stream.

Authors (such as Field, 2008; Goh, 2008) have called for more teaching of listening as a skill in its own right, rather than something which teachers assume will develop of its own accord. Research has proved that teaching listening strategy instructions has been able to improve the listening skill of students (Harris 2007; Graham & Macaro, 2008). Therefore, strategy instruction training can be considered important in the context as strategies were the thoughts and behaviors that learners use to help them comprehend, learn, and retain information (O'Mally & Chamot, 1990). Meanwhile, more recent studies (e.g., Ozeki, 2000; Carrier, 2003; Shen, 2003; Clement, 2007) on learning strategy instruction that informed students about the purpose and value of the strategies to be trained have proven to be helpful in maintaining strategy use over time and transferring strategies to new tasks.

The lecturing is the principal method of information transmittal most often practiced in universities or higher educational institutes. Lectures given in the native language do not become challenging for comprehension in academic pursuits. However, lectures delivered in foreign or second languages are a daunting task for EFL/ESL students. According to Dunkel & Pialorsi (1982), learning how to listen and take notes in L2 is, in fact, perceived to be "a question of academic survival". Academic lecturing involves primarily listening

and perhaps speaking tasks in universities or higher educational system in which students need to maintain their concentration, comprehend information, and take down important notes for later retrieval. Richards (1983) suggested that academic lecture listening primarily requires skills to identify the topic of a lecture and to follow topic development. According to Bejar et al. (2000), tasks for academic lecture listening need to assess L2 learners' abilities to comprehend details and facts, and their abilities to make an inference about the lecture content and its relationship. Further, the opportunities to interact with the speakers in academic lecture listening contexts is relatively limited and thus, the process of academic lecture listening places a high demand on the part of the listeners (Ferris & Tagg, 1996).

In the study, the theoretical framework applied was the application of metacognitive strategies in academic lecture comprehension and facilitating students with the necessary strategies of metacognition for application in academic lecture comprehension. At the heart of strategy instruction in metacognition is the concept of metacognition introduced in cognitive psychology. Metacognition is a process in which the learner is actively monitoring, controlling and arranging the cognitive process in order to attain cognitive goals. Flavell (1976) defines metacognition as to be aware of one's own cognitive processes and products or everything else which is relevant like those aspects of information related to the learning process. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) believe that metacognitive strategies are "higher order executive skills that may entail of planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of activity". Harris (2003) views metacognition as a guiding process to learning in which the learner is using strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate language use and language learning.

### **3. Methodology**

The study was conducted focusing the students in the Faculty of Management Studies, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. The design of the study comprised two stages; assessing if students already apply any metacognitive strategies in comprehending lectures and ascertaining how effective is metacognitive strategy training program for the comprehension of lectures conducted in English language. The purpose of the first stage of the study was to ascertain whether the students possess and use listening strategies, particularly metacognitive strategies, in the comprehension of lectures conducted in L2. A questionnaire prepared in English language with a translation of Sinhala language was used to elicit information as the study was based on the assumption that the students did not initially have a knowledge of listening strategies being used in comprehending lectures.

In the second stage, students were divided as the controlled group and the experimental group and a training program in metacognitive strategies was carried out to the experimental group. The students in the second semester of the second year of the Department of Business Management were divided into two groups and the student group

A with a student population of 33 was the controlled group and the group B with a student population of 40 was taken as the experimental group.

Next, a pre-test was conducted for the two groups and the metacognitive strategy training in listening comprehension process was given to the experimental group while the controlled group received the normal listening lessons included in the semester syllabus. The pre-test contained a listening task where a lecture on the subject area of innovation in business context was delivered. The difficulty level of the pre-test was intermediate and the test contained 15 'wh' questions. After three weeks of strategy training for the experimental group, a post-test was held for both the groups to gauge the level of improvement of comprehension of lectures. The post-test was similar to the pre-test in the difficulty level and contained 15 'wh' questions. It too was a listening task where a lecture on the subject area of planning was delivered.

The metacognitive strategy training program in academic listening in the study was conducted for six weeks with 12 hours of training for the experimental group. The six week strategy training program conducted in two stages emphasizing the metacognitive strategies related to academic lecture comprehension. The training program included the metacognitive strategies such as advanced organization, directed attention, selective attention, organizational planning, comprehension monitoring, self-assessment and performance evaluation. The data in the first stage were analyzed qualitatively while in the second stage, data were analyzed quantitatively using t-test.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Table1 includes students views about the metacognitive strategies used in academic lecture comprehension. Positive responses support the use of metacognitive strategies, negative responses that indicate the participants do not use metacognitive strategies and indecisive responses which do not indicate clear opinions with regard to either the use of metacognitive strategies or absence of metacognitive strategies in comprehending lectures.

Table 1  
Use of metacognitive strategies in academic lecture comprehension

Group	Use of metacognitive strategies in academic lecture comprehension		
	Yes	No	Indecisive
Controlled group	20.4%	52.7%	26.8%
Experimental group	29.4%	54.0%	16.5%

As per the data, both the controlled group and the experimental group had more than 50 percent of responses (52.7% and 54% respectively) that indicate the no use of metacognitive strategies in comprehending lectures conducted in English (L2), while the positive responses were 20.4 percent and 29.4 percent respectively, which indicate that

the use of metacognitive strategies was comparatively low. The indecisive responses were ignored as they did not communicate either of the responses, i.e. negative or positive. Therefore, the data suggest that both the groups of the study did not initially have a fair knowledge of listening strategies that they use to comprehend lectures conducted in English.

In the major study, the results of the pre-test and the post –test of the controlled and the experimental groups were compared by an independent samples t-test. As shown in Table 2, the descriptive statistics for the pre-test of the experimental group and the controlled group were almost similar. The mean scores of the experimental group and the controlled groups were 39.85 and 39.79 respectively. The standard deviation of the experimental group was 7.60 while in the controlled group the standard deviation was 7.78. Hence, the results indicate that both the groups had similar levels of performance at the pre-test that is both the groups had equal competency levels in listening.

Table 2  
Descriptive statistics for pre-test

Statistics	Experimental group	Controlled group	Entire group
Mean (M)	39.85	39.79	39.82
Standard deviation (SD)	7.60	7.78	7.63
Skewness (SK)	0.32	-0.63	-0.11
Minimum	27.00	23.00	23.00
Maximum	55.00	51.00	55.00
No. of students	40	33	73

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and result of paired samples t-test for the pre-test over the post-test of the experimental group and the controlled group. The mean value of the experimental group has been increased from 39.85 in the pre-test to 47.85 in the post-test. Moreover, paired samples t-test shows the evidence that there is a significant improvement of the listening skill among the students in experimental group ( $t=7.76, p<0.01$ ). Therefore, these results indicate that the performance of the experimental group which was subjected to metacognitive training in listening has been significantly improved.

Table 3  
Descriptive statistics of the experimental group and the controlled group

Statistics	Experimental group		Controlled group	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean (M)	39.85	47.85	39.79	42.00
Standard deviation (SD)	7.60	7.30	7.78	8.10
Skewness (SK)	0.32	-0.04	-0.63	-0.25
Minimum	27.00	30.00	23.00	27.00
Maximum	55.00	62.00	51.00	55.00
t-value	7.76		1.85	
Sig.	0.00		0.08	



In the case of the controlled group, the mean value of the pre-test was 39.79 while the mean value of the post-test was 42.00. These statistics reveal that the controlled group which was not subjected to metacognitive training in listening did not have a significant improvement in the mean value. This is also evident by the results of paired samples t-test ( $t=1.85$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). So it is apparent from these results that the controlled group which had only regular English language lessons did not improve when compared to the experimental group in the listening test that reflected the academic lecture comprehension in English medium. However, there has been a slight improvement in the mean value of the controlled group from 39.79 to 42.00. It is presumed that this slight improvement was due to the regular lessons of English language conducted during the semester.

## 5. Conclusion

This study found that university students face difficulties to understand ESL lectures delivered as they do not have an adequate knowledge of employing metacognitive listening strategies in the process of understanding lectures delivered in English. However, the study found the fact that the metacognitive strategy intervention facilitates students to improve and achieve a higher level of understanding of the ESL academic lectures by using metacognitive strategies appropriately. As researchers in the field of second language teaching and working on metacognitive listening strategies have pointed out, proper training or incorporation of metacognitive strategy training in ELT programs could boost and facilitate students with ESL academic lecture comprehension. From a pedagogical perspective, it seems reasonable to ascertain whether the curricula of the ESL programs of the universities should have provisions for metacognitive strategy training so that ESL academic lecture comprehension would be facilitated.

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## **Integrating conflict handling style of supervisors and job satisfaction of nursing officers in the public hospitals of Anuradhapura District**

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### **Abstract**

*Nursing profession provides services for the health and wellbeing of people and it is not merely a profession but a social service. Therefore satisfaction among nurses is more important to their productivity and performance, commitment to profession as well as the quality of their patient care, and patient safety. However dissatisfaction among the nurses in public hospitals is a serious issue. Nurses are facing work place conflicts with patients, peers, as well as doctors, and superiors. Therefore the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between superiors' integrating conflict handling style and the job satisfaction of nurses in Anuradhapura District. The research model conceptualized a positive relationship between anxiety, cooperativeness, resolution and the job satisfaction. A sample of 180 nurses was selected from three hospitals located in Anuradhapura district using a proportionate stratified random sampling method. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using the uni-variate, bivariate and multivariate analysis. The results indicated that integrating conflict handling style characterized with anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution has a positive effect on job satisfaction. The findings of this study would help to the supervisory level employees to planning and developing strategies to enhance the subordinates' job satisfaction through resolving conflicts in an appropriate manner.*

**Keywords:** *Anxiety, cooperativeness, integrating conflict handling style, job satisfaction, resolution.*

### **1. Introduction**

Friendly working environment and pleasurable work situation leads to the inspiration of the people, which help to the achievement of individual and organizational goals. Working environment would be unpleasant due to strict working conditions, bad

supervision and management etc. (George, Miroga & Omwari, 2013). In current competitive world every organization is facing new challenges relating to employee job satisfaction. According to Wan (2007) satisfaction is an essential aim for any organization to reach. When satisfaction level of employees increases, then this will result in more returns to the organization. The dissatisfaction of the employees has adverse effects on efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. Job satisfaction has been linked to positive workplace outcomes such as increased organizational commitment (Brown & Peterson, 1993). Aydogdu and Asikgil (2011) found that the consequences of job dissatisfaction are absenteeism, turnover, low productivity, early retirement, low organizational commitment, low mental and physical health, low life satisfaction. Sinha (2013) revealed that nearly the most of Indian doctors have low job satisfaction and so that they do not want their next generations to become doctors. The overall employee satisfaction in this sector is decreasing, despite huge increases in salaries and perks across the Information Technology (IT) sector. This is the key finding of the Best Employer Survey in 2006, which analyzed the emerging trends in the IT sector. According to the survey, the overall industry employee satisfaction index has dropped by about 11 percent compared to 2005.

Nishshan, Muraleeswaran and Akilendran (2016) stated that nursing officers in Sri Lanka have low job satisfaction. Further, workload, professional support, training received, and working condition are main factors that influence job satisfaction among nursing officers. In addition to that, study revealed that a significant number of female student nurses was psychologically distressed. Higher nurse workloads are associated with burnout and job dissatisfaction, precursors to voluntary turnover that contribute to the understaffing of nurses in hospitals and poorer patient outcomes. Ellawela and Fonseka (2011) revealed that in government hospitals the dissatisfaction among the medical staff with regard to their working environment has a strong impact, together with workload and pay. Around 6000 public health sector nurses at the main hospitals in Sri Lanka including national hospital, Colombo south, Hambanthota, Matara, Karapitiya, and Rathnapura had been strike demanding the unconditional withdrawal of illegal transfers, better salaries, decent working conditions and improved training on 2nd and 9th of December 2010.

Human Resource is an integral part of an organization. Normally a large number of employees exists in most organization. Therefore their satisfaction is more important to productivity and performance, the extent to which employees engage in cost saving, their commitment to organization and profession as well as the quality of their service. Conversely, dissatisfaction of employees increases rates of absenteeism, staff turnover, intention to leave and migration. When there are large number of employees exist, conflicts are inevitable part of an organization. Conflicts are natural and difficult to avoid, but those are controllable. According to Higazec (2015), conflict management style is very important because, it leads to employee creativity, productivity, job satisfaction and loyalty to the organization.

When examining the previous literature on factors affecting to the employee job satisfaction, Ying-Chang, Wen-Cheng, and Ying-Chien (2010) stated that job satisfaction

arises from many different sources including autonomy, quality of supervision, levels of role ambiguity quality of social relationships and level of support in the workplace. However, Aydogdu and Asikgil (2011) stated that there are two main factors that influence on job satisfaction, the factors relating to the job and the factors relating to the individual. The factors relating to the job are pay, work itself, supervision, promotion possibilities, peers, working conditions. The factors relating to the individual are individual's loyalty to company, experience, age and gender, education. According to Kabir (2011) there are three dimensions of job satisfaction namely; leadership and communication, salary and welfare, job characteristics. Moissoglou, Panagiotis and Galanis (2014) stated that the dimensions of job satisfaction are salaries and benefits, recognition and promotion, management and supervision, co-workers, task requirement, organization policies, working conditions, nature of the job, job security. In here, difficult to identify consistency of factors relating to the employee job satisfaction. It is an important problem observed in examining prior study.

The literature on conflicts handling methods identified five conflicts handling styles such as integrating, dominating, avoiding, obliging and compromising (Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Rahim & Magner, 1995; Dahshan & Lamiaa, 2014; Kazimoto, 2013; Patton, 2014, Amineh & Kangarani, 2014). Thomas and Kilmann, (1974) studied competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding styles. However Danni, Yeung and Fung (2015) have identified only four conflicts handling styles such as avoiding, dominating, integrating, and obliging. In addition Kirsten, Way and Jimmieson (2016) identified three conflict handling styles namely collaborating, yielding and forcing. Blake and Mouton (1964), who identified five modes of handling conflict; forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. Accordingly, there is no consistency among the models of conflicts handling styles. Hence, it is an important problem observed in examining how conflict handling style impacts on job satisfaction of nursing officers.

According to the empirical evidence few researchers paid attention to the influence of conflicts handling method on employee satisfaction (Lee, 2009; George, Miroga & Omweri, 2013; Graham, 2009). And also those are related to the various organizations other than public hospitals. Prior research studies have been given various conclusions with respect to the relationship between conflict handling style and employee job satisfaction. George et al. (2013); Lee (2009); Rahim and Buntzman (1989) found that, there is a positive relationship between integrating conflict handling style and job satisfaction. However Alzharani (2013) found integrating conflict handling style had negative impact on job satisfaction. Alzharani (2013); Lee (2009); Meyer (2004) and Hatfield and Hatfield (1996) show that there is a negative relationship between dominating style and employee job satisfaction, George et al. (2013) found dominating style had positive impact on job satisfaction. In addition Alzharani (2013); Lee (2009); Meyer (2004); Hatfield & Hatfield (1996) proved that there is a negative relationship between avoiding style and employee job satisfaction while George et al. (2013) proving that avoiding style has a positive impact on job satisfaction. Studies done by George et al.

(2013); Lee (2009); Hatfield (1996); Alexander (1995) found that there is a positive relationship between obliging style and employee job satisfaction, while Alzharani (2013) found obliging style has a negative impact on job satisfaction. Hence George et al. (2013); Lee(2009); Alexander (1995); Rahim and Buntzman (1989) are showing that there is a positive relationship between compromising style and employee job satisfaction while Alzharani (2013) is proving compromising style has a negative impact on job satisfaction. Even though the theoretical literature suggests that there is a relationship between conflicts handling style and employee satisfaction, it is difficult to understand what the relationship between two variables.

There is no literature related to the relationship between integrating conflicts handling style and employee job satisfaction in Sri Lankan context. Therefore it is important to find out conflicts handling style and how it relates with job satisfaction of nursing officers. Therefore these contradictions on superiors' integrating conflict handling style effects on the nursing officers' job satisfaction lead to identification of a research problem that is worth to study. Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between superiors' integrating style (anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution) and job satisfaction among nursing officers in public hospitals in Anuradhapura District.

## **2. Literature review**

According to Wan (2007) satisfaction is an essential aim for any organization to reach. When satisfaction level of employees increases, then this will result in more returns to the organization. The dissatisfaction of the employees has adverse effects on efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. So studying job satisfaction is one of the most significant areas of organizations setup. The higher the job satisfaction, the more likely employee will hold a positive attitude toward his job (Wang & Feng, 2003 as cited in Javed, Balouch & Hassan, 2014). Employees will be more satisfied if employees get what they anticipated. So, job satisfaction is relating to inner feelings of employees. Jayarathna and Hettiarachchi (2014) stated that job satisfaction is one of the most important attitudes of the employees of an organization. Job satisfaction used to describe whether the employees are happy or not. The organizations have to challenge, have to make the employee's satisfied in current job. When employees are satisfied with job then employee will perform better and therefore organization will achieve employees' competitive edge (Higazec, 2015). It is known that people usually spend a long time span of their life at work since job is one of the most important parts of their life. Therefore, an understanding of the factors relating to job satisfaction is essential in improving employees' performance and productivity (Suki & Suki, 2011). Job satisfaction can be explained as multidimensional psychological responses to one's job. These responses consist with cognitive (evaluative) and affective (emotional) components. The multidimensional responses can be identified as good/bad, positive/negative scales. Those may be quantified using assessment techniques. Those techniques assess evaluations of features or characteristics of the job, emotional responses to events that occur on the job and it depends on how one defines attitudes, behavioral dispositions, intentions, and enacted



behaviors (Judy, Hulin, & Dalal, 2009). Job satisfaction is the feelings or state of mind regarding the nature of employee work. Job satisfaction can be influenced by a variety of factors, those factors can be identified as the quality of employee's relationship with supervisor, the quality of the physical environment in which employee execute work, degree of the fulfillment of worker's work (Nawab & Bhatti, 2011). Job satisfaction is an important indicator of how employees feel about jobs and also it is a predictor of work behaviors, such as organizational citizenship, absenteeism, and turnover. Furthermore, job satisfaction can partially mediate the relationship of personality variables and deviant work behaviors (Ciarnien, Kumpikait, & Vienazindien, 2010). Jahufer (2015) identified job satisfaction as a bi-dimensional concept consisting of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction dimensions. Intrinsic sources of satisfaction depend on the individual characteristics of the person. Extrinsic sources of satisfaction are situational and depend on the environment. Both extrinsic and intrinsic job facets should be represented, as equally as possible, in a composite measure of overall job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is difficult to measure and is dependent on a number of factors, management may reduce levels of dissatisfaction and control workplace conflicts through common objectives like career development, training, appropriate rewards and improvements in the quality of working life.

Various definitions of conflict have been provided by many researchers from multiple disciplines like psychology, behavioral sciences, sociology, communication and anthropology. According to Wilmot and Hocker (2011), "the conflict is a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness". Fisher (2000) defined destructive conflict as "a social situation in which there are perceived incompatibilities in goals or values between two (or more) parties, attempt by the parties to control one another, and antagonistic feelings towards each other". Almost, Doran, Hall and Laschinger (2010) noted that dispositional characteristics are found to be major causes of conflict in the nursing field. Individuals have unique personalities and vary in "attitudes, opinion, beliefs, culture emotional stability, maturity, education, gender, language, etc." (Jha, 2010). Therefore, individuals' reactions to specific stimuli are also differ. These differences cause some individuals to identify some matters as discouraging employees' positions or refuting employee values. Patton (2014) discussed a case of value differences resulting in micro-level conflict within a hospice inpatient unit. Blurred boundaries between nurses and physicians lead to conflict when senior-level nurses, who are experts in their specialties, "frequently fail to observe the formal boundaries of nursing practice" (Bonner & Walker, 2004). Fewer employees, tighter budgets for equipment purchases, and workflow changes contribute to intergroup and intragroup conflicts (Tomajan, 2012). Discontent and frustration occur among health care workers when there are "constraints on the decision-making process" (Dougan & Mulkey, 1996).

People resolve the conflict with the best solution agreeable to all parties. This style is known as problem solving style. The issues of conflict require openness and people

involved in conflict work together, share information, and express their perspective of the problem (Rahim, 2002). When the individual is not able to solve an intricate problem, individual may collaborates with other parties to create operative solutions, and alternatives. Although collaboration is a time-consuming process, it is an integrated approach and a long-term resolution of conflict (Marquis & Huston, 2009). Rahim (2002) revealed that integrating is the most preferred style to manage conflict. Integrating style yields positive outcomes for both parties involved in conflicts. This is always perceived as a win-win solution where each party gains satisfactory outcomes. Therefore integrating is associated with many positive organizational outcomes productivity, job satisfaction, job performance, and effectiveness (Sharma & Samantara, 1994). This style is most appropriate when issues are complex and is most useful in dealing with strategic issues relating to objectives, policies and long range planning (Cai & Fink, 2002). The advantage of using this style is making all parties happy with the final decision (Rahim, 2002). On the other hand, due to letting all parties to be satisfying the final decision, it may use longer time and put in more effort than other styles.

Alexander (1995) found that there are significant positive relationships between principals' use of the collaborating style and teachers' satisfaction with their work, their supervision, and their jobs in general. Further, Rahim and Buntzman (1989) reported that subordinates' perception of their superiors' integrating style is positively correlated with attitudinal and behavioral compliance and satisfaction with their supervisor. According to Sharma and Samantara (1994), integrating is associated with many positive organizational outcomes productivity, job satisfaction, job performance, and effectiveness. Hatfield and Hatfield (1995) and Brahnam et al. (2005) found that integrating strategy had a strong association with job satisfaction. Above research evidence proving that there is a positive relationship between integrating style and employee job satisfaction. Therefore present study proposes following hypothesis.

*Hypothesis (H):* There is a positive relationship between superiors' integrating conflict handling style, characterized with anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution, and job satisfaction of nursing officers in the public hospitals of Anuradhapura District.

### **3. Methodology**

This study, which is based on correlational type, is designed to explore the relationship between superiors' integrating conflict handling style (anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution) and employee job satisfaction. Variables taken into consideration are not controlled or manipulated in this study. And also, this research was conducted in natural environment and no any influence for respondents. The unit of analysis is individual. This study selected nursing officers working in Madawachchiya, Thabuttegama and Anuradhapura teaching hospitals for the survey. There were two nursing sisters and 36 nurses in Madavachchiya Hospital, 10 nursing sisters and 108 nurses in Thambutegama Hospital and 10 matrons, 43 nursing sisters and masters, 940 nurses in Anuradhapura

Teaching Hospital. Altogether, there were 1084 nursing officers except nursing sisters, masters and special grade nurses (matrons) in these hospitals. From this group, a sample of 216 nursing officers was selected using proportionate stratified sampling technique. The survey was carried out using a structured and self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was separated into five sections focusing demographic information, anxiety, cooperativeness, resolution, and job satisfaction. Four questions were used in first section to gather important demographic information of the respondents. Anxiety, cooperativeness, resolution, and job satisfaction were measured using 5, 5, 4 and 6 items respectively on five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In order to establish the content validity of the instrument, scale developed by Rahim (1983) to measure employee superiors' integrating conflict handling style (anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution) was adopted and job satisfaction was measured with the items used by Wilson and Sebee (2004) and Kabir (2011). In addition to that the content validity of the constructs was ensured through pre-testing of the questionnaires. Test-retest method was also used to ensure stability of the questionnaire. The test was performed by selecting 20 nursing officers in Anuradhapura teaching hospital with two week time interval. The coefficients reported over 0.7 at the test-retest reveals the evidence that constructs developed to measure the key variables are suitable for the present study. Moreover, internal consistency of the constructs was assessed using reliability analysis based on Cronbach's alpha test. The alpha values reported for the constructs used to measure anxiety, cooperativeness, resolution and job satisfaction are 0.795, 0.738, 0.755 and 0.836 respectively and reveal that items used are suitable to measure the target variables. Data were analyzed using univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis techniques and more especially correlation and regression analysis were applied to test the hypothesis.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables. The result show the evidence that integrating conflict handling style is in practice in the selected hospitals. Moreover, moderately higher level of job satisfaction is shown by selected group of nursing officers.

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
Anxiety	3.5731	0.6451	0.372
Cooperativeness	3.6212	0.6048	0.344
Resolution	3.8136	0.5289	0.253
Job satisfaction	3.7686	0.5256	0.265

The results of the correlation coefficient between supervisors integrating conflict handling style and job satisfaction are presented in Table 2. According to the results, the correlation coefficients between anxiety and job satisfaction ( $r = .863, p < 0.01$ ), cooperativeness and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.253, p < 0.05$ ), resolution and job satisfaction ( $r = .348, p < 0.01$ ) are significant and positive. According to the analysis anxiety recorded a strong positive relationship with job satisfaction but cooperativeness and resolution reported a weak positive relationship with job satisfaction.

Table 2  
Results of correlation analysis

Variable	A	B	C	D
A. Job Satisfaction	-			
B. Anxiety	.863**	-		
C. Cooperativeness	.253*	.101	-	
D. Resolution	.348**	.298**	.125	-

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05

Multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the effect of all dimensions of the integrating conflict handling style and job satisfaction. In this study, job satisfaction is the dependent variable and dimensions of integrating conflict handling style are independent variables. Anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution are the dimensions of the Integrating conflict handling styles. The result of the multiple regressions is shown in Table 3. Result reveals that overall regression model is significant and suitable in predicting the job satisfaction by anxiety, cooperativeness and resolution as Adj. R square received higher value (Adj. R Square = 0.595) and F-value is significant at 0.01 ( $F = 24.170, p < .01$ ). Individual coefficients indicate that anxiety ( $\beta = .72, p < .01$ ), cooperativeness ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) and resolution ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ) have positive and significant effects on job satisfaction.

Table 3  
Results of regression analysis

Variable	$\beta$	Std. error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	xx	xx	xx	xx
Anxiety	0.725	xx	xx	0.000
Cooperativeness	0.217	xx	xx	0.030
Resolution	0.346	xx	xx	0.004
Adj. R Square = 0.595	F-Value = 24.170		Sig. F = 0.000	

According to the Pearson's product movement correlation analysis there is a strong positive relationship between integrating style and job satisfaction. The regression analysis also confirm the positive effect of integrating conflict handling style on job

satisfaction. According to the both analysis, hypothesis of the study is supported. This result is similar to the previous research studies which were conducted by George et al. (2013), Lee (2009), Rahim and Buntzman (1989). Those researchers found that, there is a positive relationship between integrating conflict handling style and job satisfaction.

## 5. Conclusion

General objective of the study was to examine the relationship between superior's integrating conflict handling style and job satisfaction of nursing officers of public hospitals in Anuradhapura District. The study found that integrating conflict handling style is more effective in resolving the conflict among the employees and it has positive influence on employee satisfaction as well. These findings would help to supervisory level employees to plan and develop their strategies to enhance the subordinates' job satisfaction through resolving conflicts in an appropriate manner. This research served as a guideline for all the researchers interested in studying this area. Future research should validate the findings of the present study focusing the other organizations in the country.

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