

Reimagining Management Education in Sri Lanka

A Colloquy

on

the 45-Year Legacy

of

Department of Business Administration

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Short Papers & Abstracts



24 October 2025

Centre of Excellence for Water and Sanitation (CEWAS)

Ratmalana, Sri Lanka

Reimagining Management Education in Sri Lanka

A Colloquy

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Prelude and Acknowledgement

Reimagining—of life and the future—appears to be a uniquely human enterprise, one that humankind, particularly as a community, possesses and exercises throughout its evolution, or ‘cyclical life process’. It remains, therefore, a (cognitive) capacity from which other animals are largely excluded.

However, within the neoliberal economy and what remains of social life—if it can still be said to exist—this human capacity is increasingly becoming archetypal, making collective futures unimaginable, except for the future that neoliberalism offers to *me* (and *you*)—but not to *us*.

When unfolding in countries on the neoliberal periphery, such as ours, this seemingly apolitical process takes on a more violent character. It unfolds through, and alongside, the layers of colonial legacy in the Global South that render the region’s economic and social fabric ambivalent. As a result, the higher education landscapes of the periphery—as well as the field of Management education within these landscapes—appear to have inherited such ambivalence.

Against this backdrop, on this day—24 October 2025—this Colloquy on *the 45-Year Legacy of the Department of Business Administration, University of Sri Jayewardenepura*, reimagines—or at least attempts to reimagine—Management education in Sri Lanka. It does so by exploring the field’s historical roots, present challenges, and future possibilities within the evolving higher education landscape of the country.

If we are prepared to abandon our (neoliberal) fantasies of becoming ‘Big’ and flashy, the nine works scheduled for presentation at the Colloquy are significant—both thematically and ethico-politically. They interrogate the neoliberal trajectories and dynamics shaping higher education in Sri Lanka (see the works of Perera, and of Wijesinghe and others); they attempt to decolonise Management education in the country (see the contributions by Rajapaksha and Jayathilaka, as well as by Alahakoon and Jayathilaka); and they explore gender dynamics in the field, particularly in relation to the history of higher education and corporate leadership in Sri Lanka (see the work of Ilangasingha and others). Furthermore, these works engage with questions of alterity in Management education (see Abeywickrama et al., as well as Samarasinghe), and seek to envision alternative or more responsible futures for Management and Management education (see the contributions of Dharmasiri, and of Chathuranga and others).

This Colloquy is a collective endeavour. I must therefore thank its companions and protagonists. The list is long—but at the very least, it is necessary to acknowledge a few names: the Dean of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, Professor Dushan Jayawickrama; the Head of the Department of Business Administration, Dr Nayomi De Peris; and all my colleagues—both academic and non-academic—in the Department of Business Administration at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, particularly Tharindu Perera and

Dr Seshika Kariyapperuma. Special thanks are due to Romesh De Silva for his role as Colloquy Secretary, and to Vidya Samarasinghe for taking care of many of the ‘chores’ that helped make the Colloquy happen.

But, of course, no Colloquy would be possible without its authors and presenters—and so, writing/violence, as Derrida reminds us—so to speak.

Professor Dhammika Jayawardena

Chair

Reimagining Management Education in Sri Lanka: A Colloquy

17 October 2025

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

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SHORT PAPERS

The Cost of Inclusion: Financial barriers and resource gaps among ‘disabled’ undergraduates in the Global South university context

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the financial barriers and resource gaps among ‘disabled’ university undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The study reconceptualized financial exclusion as a socially constructed barrier that is grounded in the Social Model of Disability. Adopting interpretivism philosophy with qualitative design, the study aims to gather insights through in-depth interviews with disabled undergraduates in universities in Sri Lanka. The study intends to explore inclusive policy reforms while bringing attention to critical structural inequalities. By shifting the discussion from access to broader structural empowerment, the study will contribute to disability studies in higher education. As this is an ongoing study, the potential theoretical and practical implications may focus on guiding equity-based reforms and fostering inclusive environments in universities.

Keywords: Inclusion; Financial barriers; Resource gaps; Disabled undergraduates; Social model of disability

Introduction

Despite the growing global understanding of inclusive education, the presence of disabled students remains largely invisible within higher education systems around the world. According to the UN (2025) and WHO (2023), over one billion people—approximately 15% of the world’s population—live with some form of disability, and this number is increasing due to population aging and chronic health conditions.

Implementing the Principles for Responsible Management Education: The role of business academics

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Abstract

Management education is vital to produce business leaders who are responsible for managing economies while being sensitive to the environment and society. Thus, fostering responsible management in education is vital to create responsible business leaders. In this milieu, business academics play a crucial role, as they are directly involved in this process. Thus, this study is intended to explore how business academics should implement the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). To explore the aforementioned objective, this study critically analysed the existing literature through the conceptual lens of PRME. Engaging in circular revisions, improving external engagements, introducing pedagogical changes and developing academic rigour of academics in teaching, learning and researching are identified as the role of business academics in implementing responsible management education.

Keywords: Responsible education; Responsible management education;
Business schools; Business academics

Introduction

Responsible Management Education (RME) has increasingly emerged as a significant trend in higher education due to the growing emphasis on aligning academic practices with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Avelar et al., 2022). The introduction of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) by the United Nations in 2007 marked an important milestone in this regard. Given decades of unethical business practices, this initiative aims to provide upcoming business leaders with the abilities, mindsets, and values necessary to strike a balance between sustainability concerns and economic goals (Russo et al., 2023). Fundamentally, PRME leads abilities of university community to create lasting value and contribute to a more equitable global economy by means of creative instruction, significant research, and revolutionary academic practices (Parkes et al., 2017).

Being Brilliant in a BANI World: Implications to management education

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the multi-dimensional nature of the increasingly popular concept called BANI, which is superseding VUCA as a way of understanding the changing world around us. Relating to the origins and usage, author observes that VUCA 1.0 reality should be faced by VUCA 2.0 responses. In evolving from a VUCA to a BANI world, the paper invites the readers to move beyond a mere understanding of the concept in presenting a concrete approach of responding resiliency towards a revival. The paper highlights BANI 1.0 illusions as per the originator and BANI 2.0 ignitions as refreshingly proposed by the author with local, regional, and global implications. In linking to the future of management education, the paper provides insights into the BANI 2.0 ignitions applicable to Sri Lanka with emphasis on enhancements required.

Keywords: BANI world; Management education; Future trends

Introduction

The rate of change has accelerated in rapid shifts in many spheres. From a planetary pandemic we have been exposed to a perilous path of turbulence. As already predicted, with the continuation of the Ukraine war on one side and the Israel–Hammas on the other side, the world has started experiencing, arguably, an economic slowdown. In such a context, a new term emerges to describe the shape of the new world, called BANI— Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, and Incomprehensible. In attempting to move ahead in ‘the forward gear’ as a battered nation, with a worthy search of economic stability, the implications of a BANI world cannot be ignored.

From VUCA to a BANI World

We are now much familiar with a VUCA 1.0 reality (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). It has its origins stemming back to 1985 as an American defence perspective in a post- cold war era (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). It came to our doorstep with a lingering lockdown way back in 2020 which prompted me to coin the required response as VUCA 2.0 namely,

Rethinking Gender Dynamics in (Management) Education and Corporate Leadership in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Surpassing the historical efforts made by Sri Lanka to achieve gender parity in education, today Sri Lankan women outperform men in gaining access to higher education, particularly in fields such as Management. However, this progressive development is not reflected in their participation at the managerial and board levels in the highly competitive corporate sector, though women remain overrepresented in the labour-intensive, low-paid occupations. In this context, by examining the historical accounts, data, and statistics gathered from various secondary sources concerning gender dynamics in higher education, management education, and public/private sector employment in Sri Lanka, we endeavour to explore women's success in gaining access to higher education from a different perspective, as this development, seen as progressive, does not necessarily reflect reality since such success is not evident in corporate sector employment, particularly in top executive positions. Hence, by adopting the theoretical underpinnings of post-colonial feminism, this paper presents how patriarchy has taken new forms in perpetuating itself in post-colonial Sri Lanka, and how colonial legacies and local patriarchal norms intersect to reproduce inequality between educational attainment and actual empowerment in the corporate sphere.

Keywords: Women's education; Gender parity; Higher education; Management education

Introduction

The scholarly discourse on women's education has been evolving globally for centuries, often emphasising women's rights to education, access to education, the importance of women receiving a formal education, and the role of men in either facilitating or obstructing women's rights and access to education (Unterhalter, Longlands, & Vaughan, 2022). Similarly, there is a longstanding history of academic engagement focused on examining and understanding the roles and positions of women within organisations (Jayawardena, 2021; Withers & Biyanwila, 2014). The literature indicates that in many countries, women have made significant progress

Decolonizing Management Education in Sri Lanka: Reclaiming indigenous knowledge and transforming pedagogical practices

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Abstract

This paper underscores the urgent necessity to decolonize management education in Sri Lanka by addressing the predominance of colonial legacies and Western centric ideas that continue to influence the nation's business education. Through a critical review of current literature and theories, this study analyzes how colonial thought is reflected within Sri Lankan management study programs and proposes transformative strategies that integrate local knowledge systems while challenging Eurocentric epistemologies. The research emphasizes that decolonization encompasses more than merely updating curricula; it requires a fundamental re-evaluation of pedagogical approaches, knowledge creation, and institutional structures to more accurately reflect and understand Sri Lankan realities. Employing postcolonial and decolonial methodologies, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational reform in the Global South and provides pragmatic steps for implementing decolonized management education within Sri Lankan universities. Decolonizing management education in Sri Lanka constitutes more than an academic endeavor; it represents a contribution to extensive processes of cultural reclamation, community empowerment, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Decolonization; Management education; Sri Lanka; Indigenous knowledge

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, the legacy of colonial education continues to influence management education systems, causing a continuous gap between academic knowledge and local realities, cultural values, and indigenous management practices (Warnapala, 2011). This paper addresses the urgent need to decolonize management education in Sri Lanka, exploring both the historical roots of educational colonialism and the transformative opportunities that come from

Agency Problem in Unregulated Private Higher Education Institutions in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to interpret the agency problem in unregulated private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka during the era of neoliberalism, with a focus on international student recruitment and transnational education. A purposive, judgmental sample of multiple cases was selected from agents based on three selection criteria. The study employed theoretical triangulation, drawing on Social Cognitive Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Domain Theory to develop a holistic interpretation of the agency problem. Findings reveal that the agency problem, in the context of international student recruitment and transnational education, can be more broadly understood as involving intentional misrepresentation, misinformation, and misconduct—extending beyond the intentions of the principal (foreign) universities. These actions stem from individual and organizational intentionality, influenced by environmental determinants, internal drives, and the dispositions of self or organizational actors. Such factors contribute to conflicting actions by agents that diverge from the objectives of the principal institutions. In doing so, the study offers valuable insights into the agency problem within Sri Lanka's higher education landscape, shaped by the broader dynamics of neoliberalism.

Keywords: Agency problem; Case study; International student recruitment; Neoliberalism, Transnational education

ABSTRACTS

Epistemic Decolonising: A road map towards the future of management education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Although university education in Sri Lanka was originally inspired by the Buddhist foundation of learning, it is now losing its geo-historical relevance under the present Western epistemic dominance. This dominance is perpetuated in actions we witness today. The curricula mimic Western models without local adaptation, disseminating dislocated knowledge. The conceptualisation of ‘university’ emulates Western models without contextualisation, and local universities pursue ‘world-class’ status based on global rankings. This puts us in a dilemma whether the world-class means perpetuating the hegemony of the Western university model, or does it mean creating a truly ‘global’ university where local knowledge is also embedded. Furthermore, citation-seeking research strategies are adopted at the expense of bringing forward indigenous knowledge, reinforcing epistemic dominance, diluting local pedagogical identity, as well as eroding institutional identity. In this context, it is our ethico-political responsibility to work towards epistemic decolonising. In doing so, we aim to provide a road map through this paper. First, being reflective of the dominant Western knowledge we disseminate, and second, proactively integrating local as well as regional and Global South knowledge into management education, creating a hybridity beyond the East-West binary. Though our voice is coming from the periphery, we could begin by joining the scholarly dialogues being woven by those contributing to management education through their own indigenous knowledge systems.

Keywords: Epistemic decolonising; Indigenous knowledge; Management education

Managing State Universities: Are we corporatized or privatized yet?

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Abstract

This paper sets some of the changes in Sri Lankan state universities against two concepts: privatization and corporatization. Even though we consider state universities to be public institutions, since the late seventies they have increasingly relied on institution-sourced funds; adhered to forms of reporting that justify the use of human and material resources quantifiably; and started using a corporate linguistic register (e.g., KPIs, stakeholders, etc.). In the critical literature on universities, such phenomena are referred to variously as privatization or corporatization. Scholars in the field claim that privatization is not fully comprehended in relation to universities, globally and indeed most Sri Lankan state university academics consider privatization yet to happen. Corporatization, a term unused in Sri Lanka much, has been defined as making universities similar to corporate enterprises, in culture and practice, imbuing a competitive ethos into these as well. I use these two concepts to critically consider: how have we understood the management changes of state universities? What are the consequences of such conceptualizations and interrogations? To do so, I examine documentation produced by 05 state universities from 2016-2020. Through this, I hope to understand these changes and its consequences as we live them now.

Keywords: Corporatization; Privatization; State universities; Sri Lanka

The (Im-)Possibilities of Responsible Management Education in Sri Lanka: When blind and visually impaired students enter public universities

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Abstract

In response to a call to share how we might reimagine management education in Sri Lanka, this paper draws attention to the higher education sector, which has largely overlooked the concerns of the blind and visually impaired (BVI) community seeking access to management education in the country's public universities. At a time when the importance of management education is widely acknowledged, the fact that BVI students remain persistently confined to pursuing arts disciplines raises critical concerns regarding the attention and commitment accorded to this matter, warranting serious discussion, if not action. Furthermore, beyond the medical condition that renders them disabled, the ethical responsibility of sighted others entails greater attention to what makes management education an (im-)possibility for BVI students in public universities in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this paper calls upon all educators, researchers, and higher education policymakers—particularly those who are sighted and able-bodied—to recognise the possibilities of crafting and delivering management curricula that embody inclusivity and accommodate students with sight loss. Drawing on a purposeful review of research conducted on the BVI student community and its accessibility to the public university system, this paper explores the (im-)possibilities of management education for this community, with emphasis on its potential role in shaping their future aspirations.

Keywords: Inclusivity; Blind and visually impaired; Management education; Ethics

APPENDIX

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Reimagining Management Education in Sri Lanka

A Colloquy

Session Schedule

24 October 2025 (8:30 AM – 5:00 PM)

Centre of Excellence for Water and Sanitation (CEWAS), Ratmalana, Sri Lanka

Time	Registration and Opening Speeches
8:30 – 8: 50 AM	Registration
8:55 – 9: 00 AM	Welcome address – Colloquy Secretary
9:00 – 9: 05 AM	A talk by the Head of the Department of Business Administration
9:05 – 9: 15 AM	A talk by the Dean of the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce
Session 1	
9:20 – 10: 00 AM	<i>Presenters:</i> Ilangasingha, R.W., Samarakoon, S. M. G. P. K., & De Silva, B. R. <i>Paper:</i> Rethinking Gender Dynamics in (Management) Education and Corporate Leadership in Sri Lanka <i>Discussants:</i> Dr. Kamalika Gauthami Jayathilaka & Mr. Sisitha Rajapaksha
10:00 – 10:25 AM	<i>Refreshment</i>
10:30– 11:10 AM	<i>Presenters:</i> Rajapaksha, Sisitha, & Jayathilaka, Gauthami Kamalika <i>Paper:</i> Decolonizing Management Education in Sri Lanka: Reclaiming indigenous knowledge and transforming pedagogical practices <i>Discussant:</i> Dr. Yasanthi Alahakoon
11:10– 11:40 AM	<i>Presenters:</i> Alahakoon, Y, & Jayathilaka, A. K. K. R. <i>Paper:</i> Epistemic Decolonising: A road map towards the future of management education in Sri Lanka
11:40 – 12:20 PM	<i>Presenter:</i> Dharmasiri, Ajantha S. <i>Paper:</i> Being Brilliant in a BANI World: Implications to management education <i>Discussants:</i> Dr. Risini Ilangasingha & Dr. Gayani Samarakoon
12:20 – 01:05 PM	<i>Lunch Break</i>
Session 2	
01:10 – 01:50 PM	<i>Presenters:</i> Chathuranga, M. M. N., Madhuwanthi, M. A. K. U., & Ayathma, S.T. U. <i>Paper:</i> Implementing the Principles for Responsible Management Education: The role of business academics <i>Discussant:</i> Snr. Professor Ajantha S. Dharmasiri
01:50 – 02:30 PM	<i>Presenters:</i> Wijesinghe, C. Janadari, Wijeyaratne, M. J. S., & Herath, H. M. R. P. <i>Paper:</i> Agency Problem in Unregulated Private Higher Education Institutions in Sri Lanka <i>Discussant:</i> Dr. Kaushalya Perera
02:30 – 03:00 PM	<i>Presenter:</i> Perera, Kaushalya <i>Paper:</i> Managing State Universities: Are we corporatized or privatized yet?

03:00 – 03:25 PM	<i>Refreshment</i>
03:30 – 04:00 PM	<i>Presenter:</i> Samarasinghe, Vidya <i>Paper:</i> The (Im-)possibilities of Responsible Management Education in Sri Lanka: When blind and visually impaired students enter public universities
04:00 – 04:40 PM	<i>Presenters:</i> Abeywickrama, H. N., Wijayasinghe, Sachin, & Fernando, W. I. S. N. <i>Paper:</i> The Cost of Inclusion: Financial barriers and resource gaps among ‘disabled’ undergraduates in the Global South university context <i>Discussant:</i> Ms. Vidya Samarasinghe
Closing Session	
04:40 – 05:00 PM	<i>Summing up: Reimagining Management Education in Sri Lanka</i>

Time Allocation:

- Presentation: 15 minutes
- Discussant’s Response: 10 minutes
- Audience Questions & Comments: 15 minutes

Sessions Chaired by:

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