Student-centered Learning Approaches in The State Universities of Sri Lanka: Exploring Socio-cultural Impacts through A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive examination of student-centered learning (SCL) in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education sector, focusing on its socio-cultural influences. The study explores the intricate relationship between pedagogical methods and societal dynamics, highlighting how SCL enhances student engagement and independent thinking. Using a literature review of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, this paper delves into the complex interplay between SCL and socio-cultural factors, including cultural values, social norms, and educational traditions unique to Sri Lanka. The research investigates the impact of SCL on key stakeholders and analyses various aspects of SCL, considering its principles, practices, and outcomes. It also addresses how these align with traditional Sri Lankan values, such as respect for authority, collectivism, and communal harmony, which have historically influenced education in the country. This paper emphasises the need for a pedagogical shift and concrete action plans. It advocates for faculty development programmes and institutional support to effectively implement SCL in Sri Lankan state universities. Additionally, the study anticipates and addresses potential challenges in adopting this modern learning approach in Sri Lanka.The findings have practical implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and educators. They highlight the importance of considering support mechanisms, curriculum design, teacher training, and cultural sensitivities to promote student engagement, empowerment, and holistic development in Sri Lanka's educational landscape.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Pedagogical Paradigm, Socio-cultural Impacts, State Universities, Student-centered Learning.

Introduction

The education system of any country plays a vital role in transforming its citizens into future leaders who can grow and uplift the country's economy and society. It provides the right knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that can create, preserve and sustain the proper value system that is crucial for the wellbeing of the country and its sustainability (Alawattegama, 2020). It also helps build the right workforce that can add value to the economy.

Student-centered learning (SCL) has gained significant attention as a pedagogical approach that prioritises student engagement, autonomy, and empowerment in the educational process. It shifts the traditional teacher-centric model to one where students actively participate in constructing knowledge and take ownership of their learning experiences (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Kahu, 2011). The implementation of SCL practices has been explored and documented across various educational settings globally, highlighting its potential to enhance learning outcomes and promote student development (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Perera, 2013).

In the context of Sri Lanka's tertiary education sector, which comprises universities and other higher education institutions from both the private and state sectors, there is a growing interest in adopting student-centered approaches to address the evolving needs and aspirations of learners. Sri Lanka's state higher education system has traditionally been characterised by a teacher-focused instructional model, where passive learning and rote memorisation have prevailed (Bandara, 2022; Sedere, 2016). In 1994, Sri Lanka experienced a notable transformation in its education system coinciding with the election of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. This juncture represented a crucial turning point in the annals of Sri Lanka's education history (Nawastheen, 2019).

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga assumed office as president of Sri Lanka in November 1994 following her election victory (Sedere, 2005). Her presidency marked a significant departure from previous administrations in terms of education policy and governance. One of the hallmark features of her administration was the introduction of a series of comprehensive educational reforms. These reforms were designed to tackle various challenges facing the Sri Lankan education system and to elevate its overall quality and effectiveness (Wickremasinghe, 2018). According to Alawattegama (2020), this paradigm shift in education started in 1931 with the introduction of the free education system by C. W. W. Kannangara who was the Minister of Education at the time. Sri Lanka's education system in the early 1990s confronted a range of issues, including disparities in educational access, varying standards of teaching and learning, and the need to adapt to the evolving demands of a rapidly changing society. Wickremasinghe (2018) states that President Kumaratunga's government recognised the necessity for reform to address these challenges. The central goal of the educational reforms was to enhance the quality of education across the board. This encompassed measures to modernise the curriculum, improve teaching methodologies, and ensure that students received a well-rounded and practical education that prepared them for the demands of contemporary life (Ranepura, 2021). One pivotal aspect of the reforms was

the decentralisation of education management. The government aimed to empower provincial and regional authorities to make decisions about their own education systems. This shift toward local autonomy allowed for more tailored and responsive approaches to education administration (Perera, 2009). The reforms also placed a strong emphasis on teacher training and professional development to equip educators with the skills and knowledge needed to implement the new educational approaches effectively. Additionally, investments were made in educational infrastructure to create conducive learning environments. President Kumaratunga's administration was committed to expanding educational access and promoting inclusivity. Efforts were made to reach underserved areas and marginalised communities, ensuring that education was accessible to all segments of the population (De Silva, 2023). These measures ensured all citizens had equitable access to formal national education. However, with changing educational paradigms and the increasing recognition of the importance of learner-centered approaches, there is a growing demand for the implementation of SCL practices in Sri Lankan state universities and colleges.

Sri Lanka possesses a unique socio-cultural background because of its multicultural diversity and requires a careful examination of the impacts SCL may have in the classroom and its stakeholders. The country's rich cultural heritage, social norms, and values influence the educational landscape, presenting both opportunities and challenges for SCL practices. Rasika (2018) claims "there is an urgent need to use student-centered curriculum in the learning process in the field of higher education to improve the quality of this process" (p. 2). Hence it is important to conduct a conceptual analysis of the socio-cultural impacts of SCL in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education industry to understand its implications and devise effective pedagogical strategies that suit the country.

While several studies have investigated the benefits and limits of SCL in various educational environments (Aytac & Kula, 2020; Trinidad, 2019; Wright, 2011), there is a dearth of research that specifically examines the socio-cultural implications of SCL in the Sri Lankan context. This study aims to fill that vacuum by undertaking a conceptual analysis of the socio-cultural consequences of implementing SCL in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education system, as well as assessing SCL's transformational potential in a culturally varied environment. This research will help to establish culturally sensitive and adaptive student-centered teaching strategies for Sri Lankan students.

The insights obtained from the analysis will guide the design and implementation of effective SCL practices taking into consideration the cultural and social factors that influence the educational landscape. Moreover, it will set a foundation for future research and initiatives focused on promoting student empowerment, engagement, and well-rounded development within the Sri Lankan higher education system.

Research Problem

This study addresses the lack of comprehensive exploration into the socio-cultural implications of implementing Student-Centered Learning (SCL) in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education sector. While SCL is gaining attention globally for its potential to enhance student

engagement and learning outcomes, its adaptation within Sri Lanka's unique socio-cultural context remains relatively unexplored. This research problem stems from the need to bridge the gap between the global discourse on SCL and its applicability and effectiveness in a culturally diverse nation like Sri Lanka.

The rationale behind this research problem lies in the recognition that Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage, diverse social norms, and values significantly influence the educational landscape. These cultural factors can either facilitate or impede the successful implementation of SCL practices in the country's state-owned higher education institutions. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural implications of SCL is essential to tailor effective pedagogical strategies that align with the unique context of Sri Lanka.

This study's significance lies in its potential to inform educational policymakers, institutions, and educators in Sri Lanka about the cultural nuances and challenges associated with adopting SCL in the state tertiary education sector. By conducting a conceptual analysis of these socio-cultural implications, the study aims to consider cultural adaptation, explore policy initiatives, integrate Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and focus technology-enhanced SCL solutions framework. It provides insights that will guide the design and implementation of culturally sensitive and adaptive student-centered teaching strategies. Moreover, the research hopes to integrate student perspectives captured through primary research and lay the groundwork for future initiatives focused on empowering students, enhancing their engagement, and promoting holistic development within the Sri Lankan state higher education system.

Research Objectives

- To examine the socio-cultural factors in Sri Lanka that may impact the feasibility and effectiveness of SCL practices in tertiary education.

- To propose culturally sensitive and adaptive pedagogical strategies for the implementation of SCL in Sri Lanka's state higher education institutions.

- To identify potential barriers and opportunities for the successful integration of SCL in state universities within the socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

SCL is an instructional approach that places students at the core of the learning process emphasising their active engagement, autonomy, and empowerment (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Kahu, 2011). It is defined as a curriculum approach that includes learning objectives that teachers structure the content around using the learning resources available such as books videos, tutorials, presentations and other materials, and evaluate the learning using assessments (Rasika, 2018) where the students are responsible for the advancements in their own learning (Wright, 2011). This modern curriculum will enable students to learn in a more engaging and collaborative way with the guidance of the teachers.

In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in integrating SCL techniques in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education industry. This review of the published literature attempts to explore existing research on the socio-cultural implications of SCL in Sri Lanka, offering insights into its transformational potential within the country's particular cultural context.

Current Higher Education System in Sri Lanka

The current higher education system in Sri Lanka comprises a diversity of universities, higher education institutes, vocational and technical training institutes that are both public (state-owned) and private in nature (Rasika, 2018) awarding both undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications (Perera, 2020). There are only 15 state universities, and the University Grants Commission (UGC) has granted other tertiary education institutes to grant their own degrees (Rasika, 2018). The current teaching structure of universities in Sri Lanka is focused on Teacher-Centered Learning (TCL) approach. It has been proven that this approach will not be able to create the needed workforce with the proper skills to suit the future job market (Walpita, 2020). This passive learning approach is not effective for the present context as the students of today learn better when they are in control of their learning (Perera, 2020). An average Sri Lankan spends approximately 14 years in the national education system in comparison to Australia where an average student spends approximately 21 years in their education system (World Bank, 2018) proving that a key to a developed nation is educating their future workforce. Furthermore, The World Bank (2018) also shows that only 8.51% of the population has completed tertiary education in Sri Lanka.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced a Sri Lanka Quality Framework (SLQF) that emphasises seven competencies that all graduates need to build namely practical skills, communication skills, intellectual skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills and Information Technology (IT) skills (Nimanthika, 2020). The curriculum of the higher education establishments in Sri Lanka needs to be re-engineered to accommodate the skill building and knowledge building that are required for the future of the country (Walpita, 2020).

The Ministry of Education under the SLQF in collaboration with the World Bank has introduced a credit system in higher education institutes that offer 10 levels of qualifications including certificate, advanced certificate, diploma and higher diploma which focus on developing Self-Directed Learning (SDL) skills (Bandara, 2022) which is the term used instead of SCL in the SLQF. This is also known as Outcome-Based Education (OBE). The students are expected to conduct a minimum of 90 hours and a maximum of 113 hours of independent learning during a semester for a given course (Bandara, 2022). The policymakers have introduced this with the intention of producing potential graduates who have the confidence to acquire and build the skills required to suit the job market in the future. This initiative shifts the focus from TCL to SCL gradually.

Cultural Factors and Educational Context in Sri Lanka

The research above shows that the Sri Lankan culture is very much education oriented with most students aspiring to join state universities. Alawattegama (2020) explains in his article that according to the Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka, over 300,000 students sit for the Advanced Level examinations and about 60% of them qualify to enter universities. Nevertheless, only about 15% of these qualified students get selected to enter state universities across the country. When students enter the higher education phase of their lives, they have already adopted study patterns and habits from schools that have been formed because of cultural influences (Marambe et al., 2012; Senadeera, 2020).

The education system in any country aligns its curriculum and learning systems to prepare the students who would eventually become the future workforce of the country. Hence, countries invest and allocate a lot of resources to meet this objective. Sri Lanka provides free education for students from Grade one up to the University level (Alawattegama, 2020) as well as issuing free textbooks and school uniforms (Perera, 2009). This has ensured the country achieves an adult literacy rate of 92% and a youth literacy rate of 97% according to the Human Development Report 2004 (Adler et al., 2004). According to the University Grants Commission (2020), the number of university students enrolled in programmes was 41669 from an estimated country population of over 21 million (Worldometer, 2023). This is an exceptionally low percentage when compared to the necessities of the workforce for the future. Despite the demand for higher education that exists in Sri Lanka, politicians are subsidising higher education standards (Gamage, 2020).

Students of the higher education system conform to either a deep or surface learning approach (Richardson, 1994) depending on the presence or absence of their learning intention (Richardson, 2000). Kember (2016) recognised a 'narrow' approach to learning existed in the Asian continent that is defined by the intention to understand what is learnt followed by memorising. Kember (2016) calls this learning pattern the 'Asian Paradox.' Puong-Mai et al. (2006) studied the different learning patterns in the pedagogy of the Western and Asian cultures and suggested that they may be connected to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. Hofstede (2001) identified five dimensions of culture to describe the possible impacts that they may have on societies, and these have been used by cross-cultural researchers to assess the influences on the education systems as well. Power distance, collectivism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance of cultures have been linked by Puong-Mai et al. (2006) as the factors that affect learning patterns the most of the six Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions.

Kember and Gow (1990) made an interesting observation in their research that irrespective of the cultural setting and differences, higher education goals remained the same globally for different national systems. These goals focus primarily on critical thinking and independent learning. Marambe et al. (2012) state their observations on the state higher education system in Sri Lanka. They have observed that students in the Sri Lankan system are over reliant on lectures as a method of instruction. The examinations place immense focus on reproducing the information and knowledge gathered in the classrooms. Marambe et al. (2012) further state in their article that Asian culture discourages the expression of thought, and this

is true in the context of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan society gives a lot of respect to the teacher. Hence, students listen to their educators and do not question or criticise them. This veneration of educators has given them an authoritarian role in the education system in Sri Lanka thus limiting the opportunity of students to develop their critical thinking skills and decision-making skills (Bandara, 2020).

In the educational context, traditional teaching methods that prioritise rote memorisation and passive learning have been prevalent (Bandara, 2020; Samarakoon, 2020; Sedere, 2016; Senadeera, 2020), especially in Sri Lanka. However, with the recognition of the need for educational reforms, there is an increasing focus on incorporating student-centered approaches that align with the cultural nuances of Sri Lanka. Understanding the cultural factors that influence educational practices becomes crucial for effective SCL implementation.

Theoretical Foundations of Student-Centered Learning

Froyd and Simpson (2010) have coined many terms that refer to SCL and some of the most used ones include Collaborative Learning, Active Learning, Cooperative Learning, Project-based Learning and Problem-based learning. They have also been referred to as Experiential Learning or Self-directed Learning according to O'Neill and McMahon (2005). The guiding principle behind the concept of SCL is student autonomy and less dependence on the teachers. Warnasuriya et al. (2015) shed light on a pivotal development in Sri Lanka's education landscape—the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC) of the UGC has introduced a transformative criterion for prospective graduates. This criterion, termed K-SAM (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Mindset), delineates four essential facets that graduates are expected to cultivate by the culmination of their educational journey. The intrinsic connection between these parameters and Sri Lanka's ambition to ascend as a knowledge hub of Asia has been underscored (Navaz, 2014). The following Table 1 illustrates the K-SAM framework adapted from Navarathne et al. (2016). This strategic alignment underscores the gravity of this initiative in reshaping the country's educational trajectory.

Table 1

K-SAM Graduates Learnings

Core Area	Learning Outcome
Knowledge (What they know)	- Theoretical and Knowledge of Discipline - Practical Knowledge
Skills (What they can do) ACRONYM: CTCMIS	- Communication - Teamwork and Leadership - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving - Managerial and Entrepreneurial - Information Management - Social Skills and Responsibilities

Attitudes, Values, Professionalism, and Vision for Life (How do they behave – think and say)	-	Attitudes
	-	Values
	-	Professionalism
	-	Values for Life
Mindset and Paradigms (How they perceive the world – effectiveness of the decisions)	-	Mindset
	-	Paradigm

Source: Navaratne et al., 2016

Notably, substantial financial resources, facilitated by the World Bank, are being channeled toward revamping lecture halls and procuring essential educational equipment (Navaz, 2014). This concerted investment is emblematic of a resolute commitment to affect a paradigm shift in teaching methodologies, one that converges with the principles of Student-Centered Learning (SCL). The allocation of billions of rupees for these endeavours stands as a tangible testament to the recognition of SCL's significance in fostering holistic learning experiences. These strategic actions are indicative of the discernment of Sri Lankan education policymakers. The acknowledgment of the paramount importance of SCL in cultivating the K-SAM attributes and propelling the nation's education system to global eminence is palpable. These decisive steps underscore a profound realisation of the pivotal role SCL plays in nurturing students' comprehensive development and readiness for an ever-evolving world. In effect, this proactive approach positions Sri Lanka at the cusp of an educational transformation, where SCL serves as a guiding light in navigating the path toward academic excellence and innovation.

In the realm of educational theory, various frameworks underpin the concept of Student-Centered Learning (SCL), delineating its profound impact on learning processes. Knowles (1980) introduced the theory of 'Andragogy,' a cornerstone of adult education that resonates with Self-directed Learning (SDL). This approach revolves around learners assuming responsibility for their educational journey, harnessing collaborative control over the process to achieve outcomes aligned with their aspirations. Andragogy underscores the inclination of adults to learn autonomously, preferring self-initiation over external guidance. This concept mirrors the essence of SCL, where students' active involvement in shaping their learning experiences catalyses deeper engagement and understanding. The notion of 'Operant Conditioning,' put forth by Henton and Iverson (1978), accentuates the transformative power of challenges in learning. It posits that substantial challenges foster profound learning by encouraging students to learn from their mistakes. This concept underscores the experiential facet of SCL, where tackling real-world challenges drives meaningful learning experiences, aligning with the philosophy of learning through trial and error.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach to learning (1986) forms a vital epistemological foundation for SCL. This theory contends that social interaction constitutes a linchpin of learning and development. Cox (2012) expands this premise through the theory of 'Informal Learning,' emphasising the potency of daily experiences in educational growth, transcending the boundaries of textbooks. Building upon this, Kyshtymova (2014) introduces the theory of

'Enculturation,' advocating for learning within one's societal and cultural milieu. This perspective underscores SCL's emphasis on collaborative learning, highlighting that leveraging diverse cultural backgrounds enhances collaborative capacities among students. Li (2012) interweaves Vygotsky's theory with Constructivism, accentuating how this synergy enriches learning experiences. Constructivism posits that knowledge construction is a self-directed process, where teachers play a facilitating role. This resonates profoundly with SCL, where students actively construct knowledge, and teachers metamorphose into guides, fostering environments conducive to holistic comprehension and collaborative discovery.

These theories, underpinning SCL, underscore the resonance of its principles with established educational paradigms. Andragogy and SDL stress autonomy, mirroring SCL's focus on student agency. Operant Conditioning reinforces the value of experiential learning within SCL's framework of real-world challenges. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory harmonises with SCL's collaborative approach, while Informal Learning and Enculturation mirror SCL's practical, context-rich learning experiences. Constructivism underscores SCL's dynamic, student-driven knowledge construction. The amalgamation of these theoretical underpinnings paints a vivid mosaic illustrating the profound alignment of Student-Centered Learning with established educational philosophies. This convergence substantiates SCL's capacity to cultivate autonomous, engaged, and culturally sensitive learners, heralding a paradigm shift in education that empowers students to be active co-creators of their knowledge.

Numerous research endeavours have accentuated the transformative advantages of Student-Centered Learning (SCL), elucidating its role in nurturing profound learning, critical thinking, and heightened student motivation (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kahu, 2011). The seminal work of Barr and Tagg (1995) marked a paradigmatic shift, urging a transition from teaching-centered to learning-centered approaches, with students placed unequivocally at the core of the educational continuum. Their framework underscores the significance of active learning, engagement, and the cultivation of critical thinking competencies, aligning seamlessly with the ethos of SCL. Building on this foundation, Chickering and Gamson (1987) presented a set of seven principles for optimal practice in undergraduate education.

These principles (Refer to Figure 1) advocate for pivotal elements like robust student-faculty interaction, collaborative dynamics among peers, and a suite of active learning strategies. These principles mirror the core tenets of SCL, accentuating its emphasis on interactive and participatory learning environments. O'Neill and McMahon (2005) contribute to the discourse by detailing a plethora of strategies that effectively facilitate the implementation of SCL within and beyond the classroom confines. This comprehensive list encompasses an array of approaches including group discussions, independent projects, debates, field trips, journal writing, practical exercises, peer mentoring, quizzes, role-playing, and presentations. These methods encapsulate the diversity and dynamism inherent to SCL, where learners are actively engaged in constructing knowledge through interaction and experiential exploration.

Figure 1

Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education
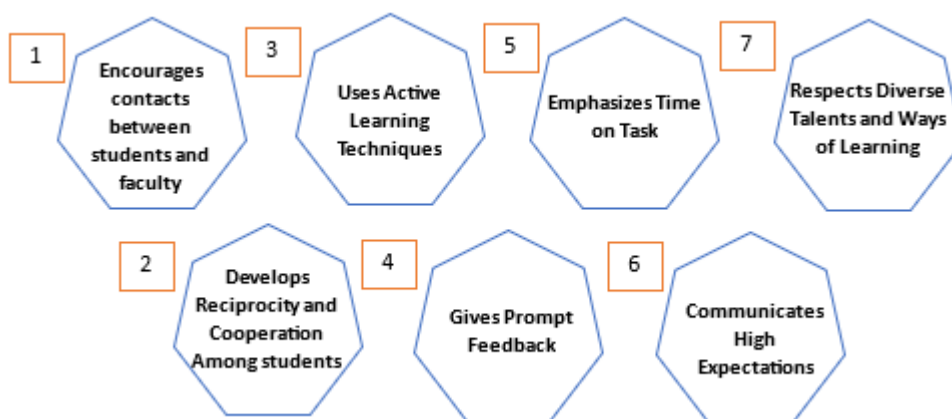
Source: Chickering and Gamson, 1987

In the contemporary global landscape, responsible management practices have gained significant prominence due to the increasing recognition of the interconnectedness between business operations, society, and the environment. Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) is another initiative that aims to integrate sustainability and ethics into business education (Refer to Table 2). Sri Lanka's higher education sector is undergoing a transformation to align with global sustainability goals and the demands of responsible business practices. The adoption of PRME reflects a commitment to nurturing future managers who are equipped to address ethical, social, and environmental challenges (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). Simultaneously, the shift towards SCL resonates with the need to empower students as active participants in their learning process, fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and self-directed learning (Marambe et al., 2011). PRME and SCL might appear distinct, with one focused on responsible management education and the other on pedagogical methodologies. However, a closer examination reveals meaningful connections that can enrich educational experiences in Sri Lanka.

Table 2

PRME Principles

The Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME)

Principle 1 Purpose:	We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.
Principle 2 Values:	We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.
Principle 3 Method:	We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.
Principle 4 Research:	We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.
Principle 5 Partnership:	We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.
Principle 6 Dialogue:	We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organizations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

Source: Malarski and Berte (2023)

A wealth of empirical investigations underscores the transformational benefits of SCL, illuminating its role in fostering profound understanding, critical thinking acumen, and intrinsic motivation among students. Barr and Tagg's transformative framework, Chickering and Gamson's foundational principles, and O'Neill and McMahon's strategic toolkit collectively affirm SCL's pedagogical efficacy. As these insights coalesce, a resounding endorsement emerges for the enduring impact of SCL as an educational paradigm that empowers learners to be active participants, critical thinkers, and engaged contributors to their learning journey. These frameworks provide a foundation for understanding the key principles of SCL and its potential socio-cultural impacts. SCL shifts the focus from teacher-led instruction to student engagement, fostering a learner-centric environment where students actively participate in knowledge construction. In the context of Sri Lanka, where traditional

teacher-centered approaches have prevailed, the adoption of SCL practices can bring about transformative changes in the educational landscape.

The Socio-cultural Impacts of Student-Centered Learning

Based on the research on SCL, the following socio-cultural impacts of student-centered learning with global examples have been emphasised.

Power Dynamics and Collaboration

SCL shifts the balance of power between students and educators. This means that the traditional hierarchy in educational institutions in Sri Lanka changes, and a more collaborative relationship takes its place. Instead of the teacher being the sole authority figure who imparts knowledge, SCL values inclusivity and encourages students to actively participate in their own learning journey (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Nimanthika, 2020).

Research shows that creating collaborative learning environments through SCL practices has a lot of positive effects. For example, it boosts student engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes (Senadeera, 2020; Wright, 2011). Given the opportunity to collaborate with their peers, students take an active role in the decision-making processes by contributing well to the outcomes of their learning experiences. They learn to share their ideas, query every assumption they arrive at, and develop their knowledge and skills collectively and enhance their subject understanding (Samarakoon 2020).

Moreover, the shift towards collaboration in power dynamics helps students take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. They get to play an active role in setting goals, making choices, and tracking their progress. This sense of agency and independence empowers them, boosts their motivation, and strengthens their belief in their own abilities (Bandara, 2020; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Wright, 2011). Harvard University in the United States has implemented active learning strategies in its tertiary education programmes. Using collaborative classrooms and student-centered approaches, Harvard promotes active student engagement and peer collaboration. This shift in power dynamics from a traditional lecture-style approach to active learning has led to increased student participation, better understanding of complex topics, and improved learning outcomes (Freeman et al., 2014).

By embracing collaborative approaches in SCL, state educational institutions in Sri Lanka can create a more inclusive and democratic learning environment. Students realise that their voice is important, and their perspectives are valued in decision-making. This environment fosters in them the respect, teamwork, sense of identity and belongingness that are important in a professional setting to work collaboratively.

Student Autonomy and Self-Directed Learning

Enhancing student autonomy and fostering self-directed learning is one of the core ideas of SCL (Bandara, 2020; Perera, 2013). Sri Lankan pupils have traditionally been subjected to teacher-centered education in which they are only passive consumers of knowledge. The SCL

process encourages students to design and direct their own learning experiences to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning skills. They are no longer passive receivers of knowledge; rather, they are active participants in their own education. This shift empowers students to take charge of their learning (Bandara, 2020; Perera, 2013). They learn to assess information, think critically, and make educated decisions about their education.

Research has shown that SCL uplifts student motivation, increases academic performance, and boosts general satisfaction (Aytac & Kula, 2020). When students get actively involved in their learning and realise they have control over their education, they become motivated and dedicated to their learning. This increased motivation leads to greater academic success and satisfaction with their school experience (Aytac & Kula, 2020). The University of Melbourne in Australia has implemented a Graduate Attributes Programme that emphasises student autonomy and self-directed learning. Through this programme, students have the flexibility to design their own learning pathways, set goals, and engage in interdisciplinary projects. The aim is to equip students with critical thinking and problem-solving skills, fostering their ability to become independent learners prepared for a wide range of career opportunities (University of Melbourne, n.d.).

Sri Lankan educational institutions may enable students to become independent learners by supporting student autonomy and self-directed learning through SCL. They gain confidence in navigating their educational journey, acquire critical thinking abilities, and become lifelong learners. These abilities are important not just for academic performance, but also for personal development and potential professional opportunities.

Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation

To ensure that student-centered learning (SCL) works effectively in Sri Lanka, it is important to take cultural sensitivity and adaptation into account (Perera, 2013). The cultural values in Sri Lanka, such as collectivism, respect for authority, and adherence to traditional norms, can influence how students perceive and engage with SCL practices. The University of Waikato in New Zealand offers Māori Studies programmes that exemplify cultural sensitivity and adaptation. These programmes integrate traditional Māori knowledge, language, and cultural values into tertiary education. Students are encouraged to explore indigenous perspectives while also gaining contemporary skills. This approach respects the cultural heritage of the Māori people and enhances cultural diversity within the university (University of Waikato, n.d.).

To make SCL successful in Sri Lanka, it is essential to respect and consider the cultural values and norms of the local context. This means customising SCL approaches to align with the cultural expectations and preferences of Sri Lankan students. For example, promoting collaboration and group work can be done in a way that respects the collectivist nature of Sri Lankan culture, where people prioritise working together and maintaining harmony within a group (Gamage, 2020).

Moreover, the culture in Sri Lanka places a strong emphasis on respecting authority figures, like teachers and elders (Marambe et al., 2012). When implementing SCL, it is important to encourage students' autonomy and active participation while still showing respect for authority figures. This can be achieved by creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas, while also acknowledging the valuable role of teachers as facilitators of learning (Perera, 2020).

Additionally, traditional norms hold significant importance in Sri Lankan culture. Adapting SCL approaches means finding a balance between honouring cultural traditions and incorporating innovative teaching and learning methods. This can be done by including local examples, case studies, and real-life scenarios that resonate with Sri Lankan students' cultural experiences and perspectives.

Case Studies of State Universities that have implemented SCL

Several state universities in Sri Lanka have taken the initiative to implement SCL in Sri Lanka to varying degrees. Some universities have implemented it only across some departments. The following are two case examples of state universities that have successfully implemented SCL as a part of their programs.

The Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies (FCMS) at the University of Kelaniya is known for its commitment to producing graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to serve society effectively. They have successfully prepared over 8000 graduates who occupy managerial positions in various sectors, including entrepreneurship (Ranjani et al., 2014).

This case study focuses on the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) with a Student-Centered Learning (SCL) approach in two degree programmes: Bachelor of Business Management (Special) degrees in Accountancy and Finance. The shift towards student-centered education is driven by the changing landscape of higher education, globalisation, and technological advancements. The Department of Finance revised its curriculum to align with the evolving financial sector, emphasising the development of competent graduates ready to lead in a global context (Ranjani et al., 2014).

The key theme here is a student-centered focus, aiming to provide quality education and develop a robust quality management system for academic excellence. The objectives include providing a deep understanding of financial concepts, enhancing critical thinking and communication skills, and preparing students for careers in finance-related organisations (Ranjani et al, 2014)

The Faculty of Management Studies at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka has initiated a significant educational transformation by adopting the Student-Centered Curriculum (SCC) approach. This innovative approach has been implemented in undergraduate courses across four departments: Accountancy and Finance, Business Management, Marketing Management, and Tourism and Hospitality Management (Rasika, 2018).

The SCC approach is designed to place students at the forefront of their learning experiences. It shifts the traditional teacher-centered model towards one where students actively engage in shaping their education. This approach encourages students to take ownership of their learning, fostering independence and critical thinking skills. By doing so, it aligns with the mission of preparing graduates for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century (Rasika, 2018).

Through SCC, students are encouraged to become active participants in their education, driving their own knowledge acquisition, and developing skills and attitudes that are highly relevant in today's dynamic and competitive world. This shift in pedagogy reflects the Faculty's commitment to providing a modern and effective education that empowers students to excel in their chosen fields and contribute meaningfully to society (Rasika, 2018).

Challenges and Opportunities of SCL

While student-centered learning (SCL) holds immense potential, implementing it in the Sri Lankan state tertiary education sector comes with its share of challenges. All stakeholders will face these challenges, especially lecturers and students. Some of the challenges and constraints include resistance to change, lack of resources, limited faculty training and infrastructure, and the need for strong institutional support (Aytac & Kula, 2020; Navaz, 2014). Additionally, cultural resistance, reluctance to depart from traditional teaching methods, and the necessity for systemic changes within educational institutions can pose significant barriers (Trinidad, 2019). To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is required, focusing on faculty development programmes, policy reforms, and fostering a supportive organisational culture. It is essential to provide educators with the necessary training and resources to transition from traditional teacher-centered approaches to SCL.

Resistance to change is a common obstacle when introducing new educational practices like SCL (Aytac & Kula, 2020). Faculty members may feel hesitant to veer away from familiar teaching methods. Bandara (2022) in his study proves that lecturers preferred TCL methods as they felt they could cover the content within the timeframe with this method over the SCL. Thus, they will benefit from training and support to effectively incorporate SCL principles into their teaching practices. Faculty development programmes play a crucial role in equipping educators with the knowledge, skills, and pedagogical strategies needed to implement SCL successfully. Furthermore, Bandara (2022) points out that first-year students may find it difficult to adjust to the SCL method of learning as they are accustomed to the TCL methods in schools.

Furthermore, addressing infrastructure needs and resource limitations is vital for the effective adoption of SCL (Aytac & Kula, 2020). Educational institutions must invest in the required technological resources and facilities to support student-centered learning environments. This may involve improving access to digital tools, creating collaborative learning spaces, and ensuring reliable internet connectivity.

In addition to faculty development and infrastructure improvements, policy reforms at the institutional level are necessary to support the integration of SCL (Navaz, 2014). Educational policymakers should prioritise and advocate for the inclusion of SCL principles in curriculum design, assessment methods, and evaluation processes. Such reforms provide a clear mandate and framework for educators to embrace and implement SCL effectively.

Moreover, fostering a supportive educational culture that values innovation and collaboration is crucial. PRME's call for collaboration among business schools, industries, and communities shares similarities with SCL's promotion of collaborative learning environments (Oosthuizen et al., 2018). This synergy fosters a global perspective as students engage with diverse viewpoints and global challenges. The integration of PRME principles into SCL practices can lead to graduates who understand the global context of responsible management and can collaboratively address global challenges. Gamage (2020) advocates Openness to Innovation as a key ingredient to surviving in the higher education industry and being able to complete on an international scale. Institutions should create an environment that recognises the importance of SCL and supports educators in their journey to adopt this approach. This can be achieved through leadership initiatives, building communities of practice, and establishing mentorship programmes where experienced SCL practitioners can guide and support their colleagues. Gamage (2020) gives a case example of open online courses that are offered by high-ranking universities where they advocate 'research-based training and not glorified tutoring' (para. 30).

The cultural context holds immense importance when it comes to implementing and ensuring the effectiveness of student-centered learning (SCL) in Sri Lanka. The educational landscape of the country is heavily impacted by its own culture, values, customs, and beliefs, which in turn influence the acceptability and implementation of student-centered approaches (Sedere, 2016). To successfully deploy SCL, it is critical to analyse the cultural context and tailor SCL tactics to local beliefs and customs. Sri Lanka boasts a rich cultural heritage that significantly shapes various aspects of society, including education. Cultural values that place an emphasis on maintaining harmony have a profound influence on teaching and learning practices (Sedere, 2016). Recognising and respecting these cultural values is key when introducing SCL in Sri Lanka.

To ensure the efficacy of SCL, it is critical to consider the cultural context and modify instructional tactics accordingly. This entails adding local examples, case studies, and real-life scenarios that are relevant to Sri Lankan students' experiences and opinions. By doing so, educators can create a more meaningful and relatable learning environment that connects with the cultural context of Sri Lanka (Beligatamulla, 2018).

According to The World Bank (2009), the future of Sri Lanka's global knowledge economy of the 21st century is heavily reliant on the country's intellectual and human capital it produces. A knowledge economy demands thinking, acting creatively, and working industriously to be able to adapt and innovate technologies to strengthen its economic activities. Furthermore, valuing and incorporating local traditions and beliefs can significantly enhance student engagement and active participation in the learning process. By integrating

cultural elements into SCL practices, education becomes more relatable and meaningful for students, as it establishes a connection between their learning experiences and their cultural identity and heritage.

Discussion

The implementation of SCL in the Sri Lankan state tertiary education sector holds significant implications for students, educators, and the broader educational landscape. This discussion examines the socio-cultural impacts of SCL in Sri Lanka taking into consideration the current educational context of the country, based on the reviewed literature provided above, and explores the practical considerations and potential benefits associated with its adoption using the theoretical foundation identified.

Sri Lankan state higher education institutions are currently focusing on the TCL approach that the country's traditional education system is used as the primary method of conducting classes and building skills required for the future job market (Rasika, 2018). Marambe et al. (2012) clearly argue that this is a passive method of learning where memorisation is key which limits the potential of the students to develop and grow essential skills such as decision-making and critical thinking. Furthermore, The World Bank (2018) highlights the need for educational reforms to meet the future demand for skills and competencies of the workforce. The SLQF introduced by the UGC emphasises the need to re-engineer the curriculum and create a paradigm shift to align the education system with the desired skills and competencies (Rasika, 2018).

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the educational context in Sri Lanka. The country's rich cultural heritage and societal norms contribute to an education-oriented culture, with students aspiring to join state universities (Alawattegama, 2020). The country's vast cultural heritage which has its own set of social norms, beliefs, traditions, rituals, and values shape the educational setting and influence how fast student-centered approaches are accepted and adopted (Beligatamulla, 2018). However, traditional teaching methods and the veneration of educators limit students' opportunities for critical thinking and expression of thought (Marambe et al., 2012). The educational system aligns its curriculum and learning systems to prepare students for the future workforce, necessitating the consideration of cultural influences (Marambe et al., 2012). It is important to consider the cultural context and adapt SCL strategies to align with local values and traditions. This ensures that SCL practices are culturally sensitive and relevant, promoting a harmonious integration of innovative pedagogical approaches within the existing cultural fabric.

The theoretical foundations of SCL provide a basis for understanding its principles and potential impacts. The concept of SCL aligns with theories such as Andragogy, which emphasises self-directed learning and learner autonomy (Knowles, 1980). According to this theory, adult learners are motivated by the desire to know and learn, and they should be actively involved in the learning process. The socio-cultural approach to learning, as advocated by Vygotsky, highlights the importance of social interaction and cultural backgrounds in knowledge construction (Cox, 2012; Vygotsky, 1986). These theoretical

frameworks support the principles of SCL, where students take an active role in their learning and construct knowledge from their experiences.

The linkage between PRME and SCL can create graduates who possess not only technical skills but also a deep understanding of responsible management practices and the ability to think critically and independently. This holistic skill set enhances graduates' employability, as organisations increasingly seek socially and ethically conscious managers. By merging PRME and SCL, educational institutions can foster a culture of responsibility and ethics. Students exposed to responsible management principles in student-centered learning environments are more likely to internalise these values, carrying them forward into their professional careers (Oosthuizen et al., 2018).

One key socio-cultural impact of SCL in Sri Lanka is the shift in power dynamics between students and educators. The Sri Lankan education system has always been characterised by a teacher-centric approach, where students receive information passively (Marambe et al., 2012). In a SCL environment, the teacher acts as a facilitator, and students take an active role in their learning. This shift in power dynamics fosters a more collaborative relationship between students and educators, where students are encouraged to participate actively, share their ideas, and work together to solve problems. This collaborative learning environment enhances student engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes (Perera, 2013). This shift promotes a more inclusive and democratic learning environment, where students' voices are valued and respected.

Enhancing student autonomy and self-directed learning is another socio-cultural impact of SCL in Sri Lanka's tertiary education sector (Marambe et al., 2012). SCL encourages students to take ownership of their educational journeys and make informed choices regarding their learning paths (Aytac & Kula, 2020). By allowing students to take charge of their learning, SCL empowers them to become active participants in their education. This shift in responsibility increases student motivation, academic performance, and overall satisfaction. Students become lifelong learners and gain confidence in navigating their educational journey.

The promotion of Self-directed Learning (SDL) in Sri Lanka can help address the issue of limited opportunities for students to develop independent thinking and decision-making skills allowing students to develop lifelong learning abilities among Sri Lankan students. Chickering and Gamson (1987) claim that SCL contributes to the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Through active engagement and inquiry-based learning, students are encouraged to question assumptions, analyse information critically, and generate innovative solutions (Wright, 2011). These abilities are vital in a constantly changing knowledge-based society where individuals must adapt, think critically, and contribute to innovative solutions to intricate problems. By cultivating self-regulation and personal agency, SCL prepares students for success beyond the classroom. Local case study examples of the Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies of the University of Kelaniya and the Faculty of Management Studies at Sabaragamuwa University have shown that implementing SCL is feasible, and it is within the scope of all other state universities who may wish to implement a roll out of this approach in all their faculties eventually.

However, the implementation of SCL in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education sector is not without its challenges. Institutional support and faculty development programmes are vital to ensure the successful integration of SCL practices (Trinidad, 2019). Adequate training and resources for educators are necessary to facilitate the transition from traditional teacher-centric approaches to SCL. Educational institutions need to invest in professional development programmes that equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement SCL effectively.

Conclusion

Implementing SCL in Sri Lanka's state universities sector has significant socio-cultural impacts. The educational system in Sri Lanka must strike a balance between preserving cultural values and fostering an environment that promotes active learning and critical thinking. It shifts power dynamics, giving students a voice and promoting a collaborative and inclusive learning environment. It has the potential to transform the educational landscape by promoting student empowerment, collaboration, and self-directed learning. SCL also enhances student autonomy preparing them for success beyond the classroom. It fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, vital skills for a rapidly changing society. OBE, the credit system and the K-SAM are three such initiatives that have slowly started transforming the education system in Sri Lanka. However, its successful implementation requires cultural sensitivity, adaptation, and addressing challenges specific to the Sri Lankan context. SCL implementation also requires institutional support, faculty development, and consideration of cultural factors. The central findings of our investigation underscored the following key points:

Need for Adaptation: Sri Lanka's educational system, while robust, must adapt to the evolving global educational paradigm. The traditional teacher-centered model calls for a transition toward a more student-centric approach.

Enhanced Engagement: Student-centered learning fosters increased student engagement, motivation, and ownership of the learning process. It aligns with the idea that education should not be a passive reception of knowledge but an active, participatory experience.

Diverse Learning Styles: Recognising the diverse learning styles and preferences among students is pivotal. SCL allows for the customisation of learning experiences to cater to individual needs, thus promoting inclusivity.

Teacher Development: Preparing educators to effectively implement SCL strategies is imperative. Continuous professional development programmes should be established to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Assessment Reforms: Assessment methods should evolve to align with SCL principles. Formative assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment should be integrated to gauge student progress accurately.

Infrastructure and Resources: Adequate infrastructure and resources, including digital tools and materials, are vital to facilitate SCL effectively. Investment in technology and educational resources is essential.

Policy Framework: Educational policymakers must formulate a comprehensive policy framework that supports the integration of SCL into the national curriculum. This should include guidelines for teacher training and resource allocation.

Negative attitudes of stakeholders, lack of resources and support are among some of the reasons that have hindered its progress. Changing the programme delivery and structure alone may not be sufficient to produce a graduate with the right attributes desired. By embracing SCL, Sri Lanka can empower students, cultivate essential skills, and align education with local values. There is a need to conduct more comprehensive research studies that would provide better insights into how the current strategies could be adapted or changed to suit the SCL goals. This review provides a foundation for future research and informs educational policymakers, institutions, and educators in developing strategies that effectively integrate SCL principles while respecting Sri Lanka's unique cultural heritage. To promote student-centered learning effectively in Sri Lanka, it is imperative that educational policymakers, institutions, and educators take concerted action:

Policy Alignment: Educational policymakers should draft and implement policies that align with the principles of student-centered learning. These policies should emphasise the importance of active student participation and adaptability in teaching methods.

Teacher Training: Institutions must invest in continuous professional development for educators. Training programmes should focus on SCL strategies, assessment methods, and leveraging technology for enhanced learning outcomes.

Resource Allocation: Adequate resources, both physical and digital, should be allocated to schools and colleges to facilitate SCL. This includes ensuring access to technology and learning materials for all students.

Assessment Reform: Institutions should revisit their assessment methods, emphasising formative assessment and feedback. Encouraging a shift away from traditional exams toward a more holistic evaluation of student progress is essential.

Research and Evaluation: Ongoing research and evaluation of SCL implementations in Sri Lanka should be conducted. This will provide valuable insights for refining and improving SCL practices over time.

Future Directions

Building upon the current understanding of SCL in the Sri Lankan state universities sector, this section outlines potential future directions for research and practice. These directions aim to further explore and enhance the socio-cultural impacts of SCL, contributing to the continuous improvement of educational experiences for students in Sri Lanka.

Empirical Studies: Future research should focus on conducting empirical studies to examine the specific effects and outcomes of SCL implementation in the Sri Lankan context. These studies can explore the academic performance, student satisfaction, and overall well-being of students who engage in SCL practices. By collecting empirical evidence, researchers can provide a clearer understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with SCL in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the effectiveness of current initiatives by the Ministry of Education such as OBE, the credit system and the K-SAM could be evaluated for further development.

Cultural Adaptation: As Sri Lanka has a diverse cultural landscape, future directions should emphasise the importance of adapting SCL practices to align with the specific cultural nuances and values of different regions within the country. Research can investigate how SCL strategies can be customised to respect and integrate local cultural traditions and norms while promoting student empowerment and engagement. For example, the Northern Province could focus on the norms and traditions of the predominantly Hindu culture of the region.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: To effectively link PRME and SCL in Sri Lanka's higher education landscape, collaboration among educators, administrators, and industry stakeholders is essential. Future directions should focus on designing comprehensive training programmes for educators. These programmes should equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and pedagogical strategies to facilitate SCL approaches. These programs can be customised to suit the regional requirements of the faculties. Research can evaluate the impact of such training programmes on teacher attitudes, instructional practices, and student outcomes.

Student Perspectives: Future research should emphasise capturing the perspectives and voices of students regarding their experiences with SCL. Understanding the students' perceptions, motivations, and challenges can provide valuable insights for designing student-centered educational environments that truly meet their needs. Qualitative studies, interviews, and surveys can be employed to explore student perspectives on SCL practices and their socio-cultural implications. The findings of these studies may help strategise to mitigate the challenges faced in implementation.

Scaling up and Sustainability: To ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of SCL practices in Sri Lanka, future directions should address the challenges associated with system-wide implementation. Research can focus on identifying strategies and policies that facilitate the integration of SCL at the institutional and national levels. Additionally, exploring successful case studies and best practices from other countries that have successfully implemented SCL can provide valuable insights into the Sri Lankan context. The foreign university presence in Sri Lanka is ever-growing. The local university system can collaborate with a foreign entity to help with successful SCL implementation.

Technology-Enhanced SCL: With the rapid advancement of technology, future directions should explore the integration of technology-enhanced SCL practices in Sri Lanka's state tertiary education sector. This can involve examining the use of digital tools, online platforms, and blended learning approaches to enhance student engagement, collaboration, and personalised learning experiences. Numerous technologies are being used in the classrooms.

The effectiveness of these is yet to be evaluated. Research can evaluate the effectiveness of these technology-enhanced SCL models and their compatibility with the socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka so that the best tool can be identified for successful implementation of SCL.

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