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Factors Affecting Scholarly Practices in Private Higher Education Institutes in Sri Lanka: A Conceptual Framework

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, entering a university has been increasingly competitive which have triggered many problems with regard to the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. To overcome this crisis on university entrance, since 1978, the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, the apex body of the University System in Sri Lanka granted permission to the private sector to award degrees as an integral part of the higher education policy. The objective of this policy was to minimize the foreign currency outflow incurred on overseas education and support the needy students to get admission for higher education at the national level. However, it has been identified that most of these institutes consider enhancements of quantity rather than development of quality which can facilitate academicians' scholarly achievements. It is observed that research and innovation in local private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are far behind the country's requirements. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors affecting scholarly practices in private HEIs in Sri Lanka. After reviewing the literature, a conceptual framework and twelve testable hypotheses were developed for this study. This study uses secondary data to identify determinant factors. Accordingly, environmental stimulus, perceived organizational culture stimulus and the psychological stimulus were selected as important determinants which can directly as well as indirectly mediate with stress and happiness to enhance the performance of academicians, concerning the scholarly practices in private HEIs.

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Keywords: Environmental stimulus; perceived organizational culture stimulus; psychological stimulus; stress; happiness; scholarly practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Education System of Sri Lanka dates back to more than two millennia [1]. Sri Lanka is a South Asian country that is enjoying free education from grade one to college level. Even though, according to the population census 2012, only 4% are reported to have a bachelor's degree who are above 25 years age in Sri Lanka [2]. The main reason behind this scenario is the lack of capacity in state sector universities to cater to all eligible students. At present, fifteen universities and three campuses, eighteen graduate institutes including post-graduate institutes are registered s state universities [3].

To overcome the crisis of university admissions aggravating, in 1978, the higher education policy of Sri Lanka encouraged and granted permission to the non-state sector to award degrees. In 2019, 21 institutes have been approved as degree-awarding institutes by the University Grants Commission, the apex body of the University System in Sri Lanka [3]. Moreover, there are an enormous number of institutes affiliated with foreign universities are also offered degrees. Various private sector degree-awarding institutions have leaped up across the country to cater to the rising demand for higher education. The expansion of higher education opportunities in Sri Lanka via non-State actors has enabled many students, some of whom would otherwise have studied abroad, to graduate locally at a considerably lower cost, and saving foreign exchange. Those who cannot afford overseas education have been increasingly looking at the domestic market for alternative options. The curriculums are controlled by the University Grant Commission, which is registered by the UGC to maintain a reputation. As a result, the outflow of currency for overseas education is significantly reduced and helps high school graduates to enter into higher education who cannot get admission in state universities and afford higher education abroad.

Nonetheless, other than these benefits, the quality of education offered by most private universities is far behind those levels of world universities. It is observed that university academicians' research and innovation seem to be insufficient. Qualified lecturers prefer pay more attention to teach rather than scholarly works. The gap between the proficiency and

actual practices of academicians widens, which could be affected by the quality of university education.

Mowery [4] concluded that universities serve as a medium for the circulation of knowledge through the supply of trained graduates to the industry, faculty consulting and conferences, and accumulate external knowledge through international science and technology partnerships. Accordingly, world universities are converting from a teaching-centered to one that is research-centered. The responsibility of Sri Lanka universities has to be led towards an innovation economy, by providing the advanced human resource capacity for innovation through scholarly practices. Academic publications, patents and licenses from universities play a marginal role in national innovation systems [4].

The mean h-index in state universities in Sri Lanka is; "faculty of science with the best mean h-index of 5.55, followed by medicine (5.24), engineering (3.81), agriculture (3.76), management (2.74) and arts (2.62)" [5]. The National Intellectual Property of Sri Lanka [6] reported that only 282 patent applications were received and 54 registered in 2017. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization [7], the average value of the intellectual property for Sri Lanka during 1981-2013 was 77 patent applications with a minimum of 6 patent applications in 1981 and a maximum of 328 patent applications in 2013. The Webometric [8] ranking based on Google Scholar citations indicates that only one private HEI has qualified to be in the first 10,000 world rank. Moreover, research and development expenditure as a percent of GDP during 1996-2015 showed a minimum of 0.1% in 2015, and a maximum of 0.18 in 1996 [9].

Times Higher Education (THE) Rank of the universities in 2019 and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Rank of the universities in 2018 show that only the University of Colombo has been qualified to be included in the first 1,000 universities. None of the private HEIs have been successful in being included in the list [10,11]. Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) is another popular and most widely used international university ranking index which shows that no Sri Lankan universities has qualified for the list [12]. According to the U21

ranking index, only India qualifies to be included in the index, but not Sri Lanka in the South Asian region [13].

CWTS Leiden Ranking 2019, heavily focuses on research (p values) or scientific performance of the universities [14]. According to this rank, 750 universities from 48 countries have qualified under this ranking. However, none of the Sri Lankan universities qualified. U-Multirank Rank [15] shows two universities are at a slightly average level from 325 Asian universities, but none of the Sri Lankan universities have failed to do so. According to the Global Innovation Rank Sri Lanka is ranked 88 in 2018 [16]. Moreover, the Science Citation Index cannot find any Sri Lankan journal comparing with India 48, Pakistan 2, and Bangladesh 2 [17]. However, Scimago Journal & Country Rank listed six journals and one journal has an 18 h index while another journal has a 12 h-index. The remaining four journals have less than 10 h-index [18]. Pethiyagoda [19] highlighted that only 234 research papers of Sri Lankan scientists' were indexed in scientific journals while papers of 21,397 Indians, 933 Pakistanis, and 436 Bangladeshi have been able to do so.

These shreds of evidence show that Sri Lanka is very far behind the scholarly works and innovations and it is a fundamental issue in private sector HEIs. After four decades of allowing the private sector to enter into the higher education system, from 1978 up to 2018, it has been recognized that most private HEIs focus on quantity improvement rather than quality development. These self-funding institutes concentrate on economic returns through an increasing number of students as well as numerous kinds of degree programs, academic research and scholarships that have been very often neglected.

Performance of some of the private HEIs have been encouraging and supporting towards scholarly work; however, scholarly practices still depend on individual interests and involve limited documentation. Apart from this, scholarly works are marginal, but its relevance for academics or social development is also far behind. Most of the research is academic based and considers only the output of academic work rather than its outcome. Past graduated students mentioned that "Teachers need to upgrade their knowledge which is required for quality education" [20]. Most of these private HEIs are affiliated with foreign

universities, especially those from the United Kingdom or Australia, which maintain the quality standards of their main campuses and focus more on teaching rather than research. Moreover, hardly a database has been developed for the private HEIs. Not only this, but there is no direct government authority other than curriculum approval, to screen the practices of private higher education in Sri Lanka [21].

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

During four decades from 1978 up to 2018, it has been observed the absence of a regulatory mechanism to control academic quality private HEIs in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF) was introduced in early 1990s, but not yet award accreditation for universities locally. Quality of teaching depends on enhancing lecturers' knowledge through research and innovation. More business-oriented private HEIs pay concern to increase the number of graduates rather than increase the quality of graduates through expanding their knowledge. This is, therefore, one of the responsibilities of the government to develop policies to improve the quality of the output and measure the outcome by promoting scholarly works among lecturers. Overall, university ranking indexes are based on international standards. Although many paper-based journals have been published by local universities, these are not eligible for international rankings. In addition, even though private HEIs engage in scholarly works, those are not recorded other than individual profiles of academicians.

Many researchers focused on issues on state sector HEIs. To date, comprehensive and substantial studies have not been conducted to determine the direct causes pertaining to the lack of scholarly practices in private sector HEIs. This lack of research could be attributed to the fact that the problem exists, but cannot be seen and most probably hidden. Within the private HE sector, new research cultures and scholarship require to be enhanced. Thus, the need for a study in this issue is essential to identify the real causes behind the lack of scholarly practices to formulate policies to cultivate a research culture among private sector HEIs. This study focuses on the problem concerning the absence of a scholarly culture in private sector HEIs and attempts to identify real causes on the same. Hence, the objectives of this study are to examine the major factors affecting scholarly practices in HEIs in Sri Lanka and thereby to

develop a conceptual framework which can address this issue.

3. LITERATURE SURVEY

Most of the past literature have recognized environmental, organizational, and psychological stimulations that are more fundamental to scholarly practices, and aspects such as stress and happiness which can be directly and indirectly affecting performance of academicians on scholarly work.

3.1 Environmental Stimulus

Environmental stimulus refers to uncontrollable events of the external environment. The changes in the higher education system depend on expansion and complexity in the knowledge [22]. Global knowledge is able to stimulate university activities to discover and experiment with new knowledge and innovations [23]. The universities are also a platform for integrating with society and act as a facilitator for country development [24]. The internal quality assurance accelerates the quality of high education and the process to reach the expected standards, where universities have to follow procedures of the accreditation body [25], Marsh & Lee, 2014). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 2007 to meet the current challenges of quality in higher education in Sri Lanka. The QAA has guided universities by way of program reviews and reviewing the quality of higher educational institutes [3].

3.2 Perceived Organizational Climate Stimulus

Organizational Stimulus refers to the perceived environmental stimulations, which direct to achieve organizational performance [26,27]. Organizational climate is defined as "how it feels to be a member of the organization" [28]. Organizational climate might be strongly influenced by the behavior of employees as well as performance [29]. Bowling Green State University [30] affirmed that university lecturers are satisfied with autonomy, freedom, professional relationship with peers as well as administrators, salary and other benefits, students' quality, research and innovation facilities, top management support, teamwork and communication, policies procedures and professional ethics. Moreover, time pressure, red tape, personal responsibilities, workload,

pressure for research and innovations, and unable to balance work-life were also factors that caused stress among them.

The University of Idaho "Work-Life Study Reports" points that "organizational climate, autonomy, affiliation with peers, discrimination and harassment, job position, career development, and work-life" are significant factors for job satisfaction among university lecturers [31]. Also, factors such as salary and benefits, opportunity to carry out scholarly works, relationship with the administration and availability of child care were given less importance for job satisfaction.

Job stress among university lecturers depends on workload, preparations for teaching, lab work, and seminars, students' misbehavior, maintenance targets for scholarly works, innovations, writing a proposal for research funds, and publishing and attending a conference [32]. Kinman [33] also highlighted that the job stress of academics in the United Kingdom depends on "policies, demands for publications and teaching, responsibility, autonomy and administrative duties".

3.3 Psychological Stimulus

James, James & Ashe, [34] point out that "individual' own values for their well-being as psychological climate". According to Quninn & Rohrbaugh [35], high-performance management system in any organization relies on the 'Human Relation Approach' which describes how employee morale, commitment and satisfaction influenced job performance. Callahan [36] defines personality as traits and behavior of an individual based on these personal traits. Teachers' personality projects unique traits and behavior they exemplify during teaching. These personality traits stimulate their cognition, motivation and finally, their work as a teacher [37]. Besides, Kodituwakku [38] indicates that "Psychological Capital was found to be positively associated with job satisfaction". Employees' desire to engage in organizational activities is referred as Organizational Commitment. Zeinabadi [39] explains that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are influenced by the Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) of university lecturers. The lecturers' motivation for teaching, research and community services are strongly influenced by job performance [40]. Ramachandran et al. [41] confirmed this phenomenon by indicating that lecturers'

motivators such as availability of facilities have a direct impact on their job performance.

3.4 Scholarly Practices

Scholarly practices are defined as academicians' work in the theory and research relating to their domain field [42]. Further, it can be derived from the study [42] that applying the knowledge of professionals in practice by conducting research recommended or improved existing theories. Benham [43] mentions scholarly practices as a researcher who is involving problem-solving activities by practicing theories. For this study, scholarly practices are defined as university lecturers' research and innovation activities which they engage in, to improve knowledge and quality of teaching.

3.5 Happiness

Happiness at work has been defined for this study as academicians' positive feelings about their work and their self-esteem towards the betterment of the job. Also, happiness is identified as a significant factor for job satisfaction and performance [43]. In addition, happiness can be recognized as having a negative impact on job stress and intention to quit [44] and thus, it significantly and positively affects employee turnover [45].

3.6 Stress

When comparing with other professions, the teaching profession has more social responsibilities. Society considers teachers as second parents who guide students, which would be a stress for the teachers as they attempt to sustain professional distinction. Teachers who work under stress can lead to poor job performance [46]. Academicians' job anxiety is influenced by their teaching, administration and research activities as well as issues regarding work-life balance [32]. Academicians directly deal with students always. The demand of students and organizational demand have a likelihood to cause job stress among teachers [47].

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The most fundamental problem of this study is to answer the following questions. 1. What are the factors that affect the lack of research and innovation on academic staff in the private HEIs

in Sri Lanka? 2. What aspects of the role of academic staff have an impact on research and innovation? 3. Why do these aspects impact scholarly practices in private HEIs in Sri Lanka? Various researchers identified different causes that affected academicians' job performance. However, it is challenging to reason out a conceptual framework as a remedy for these questions. The studies, which were reviewed, indicated that different factors, directly and indirectly, affected academicians' scholarly practices. After reviewing the literature, a conceptual framework is developed to identify Public Policy Planning for Research, Development and Innovation Culture in private HEIs as shown in Fig. 1.

5. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework to determine the perception of academicians towards scholarly practices in a private Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Sri Lanka. This is a desk research, uses secondary data to identify determinant factors of scholarly practices in private HEIs in Sri Lanka. Therefore, data were collected from various published sources such as relevant books, peer-review journals, reliable and reputed websites, and electronic publications etc. Based on these secondary data, all (12) propositions were developed. Thus, the study presents the current status of the issue in scholarly practices in HEIs in Sri Lanka. .

6. LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

There are many different scholars who supported literature for the factors shown in the conceptual framework. This section synthesizes these hypotheses.

H1: Environmental Stimulus has a positive effect on Happiness

The researchers discovered that happiness can be identified through an interactionist approach, which "focuses on the way happiness emerges from the interaction of mind and world" [48]. Happiness emerges with the connection between internal and external stimulation. The interactionist approach clearly describes that the environment outside the person can be a major cause of their happiness. The external

environmental factors which could be affected by academicians' happiness at the university level, globalization, geography, government support, and quality assurance policy factors have been given more priority. This proposition was confirmed by many researchers [3,22,23,24,25, and 49].

H2: Environmental Stimulus has a negative effect on Stress

Stressors that come from the external environment, which are unable to control by employees. Stress can arise from factors that are apart from the normal life cycle or series of

challenges from the external environment which required responses [50]. Adapting to globalization, locational issues, government support and quality assurance policy are considered as stressors for academicians. Stress could be arisen "if environmental demand exceeds the natural regulatory capacity of an organism, in particular situations that include unpredictability and uncontrollability" [51]. In addition to these, the findings of Drucker [23]; Diaco et al., [24]; Hakeem & Thanikachalam [25]; Marsh & Lee [49]; and UGC [3] support this proposition. Swan, [52] indicated that academicians undergo high stress due to maintaining quality demand for education.

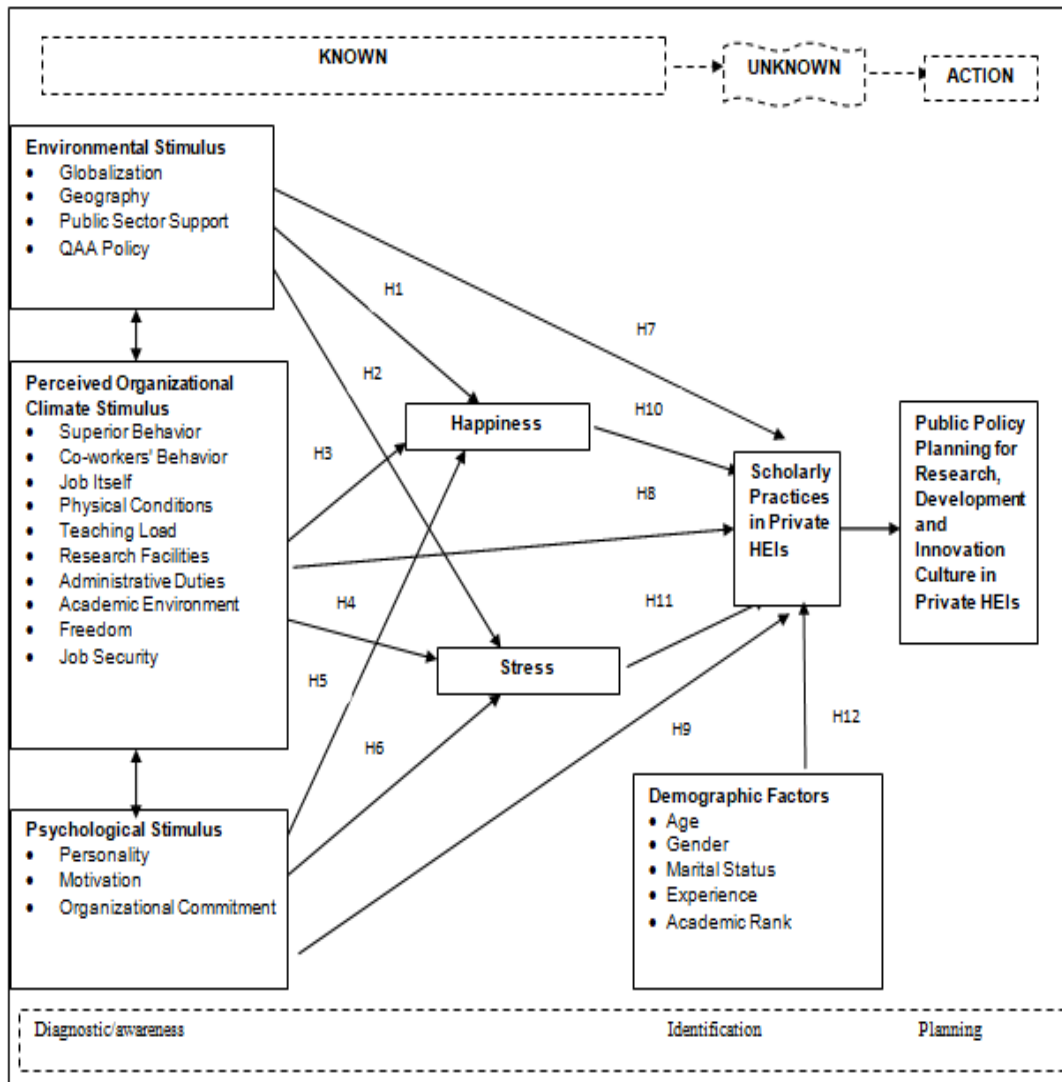


Fig. 1. Policy planning for research, development and innovation culture in private HEIs

Source: Author's illustration

H3: Perceived Organizational Climate Stimulus has a positive effect on Happiness

Many researchers who conduct studies in an organizational climate focus more on "psychological climate", which directly influences employees' happiness. Nevertheless, most of these studies discovered that perceived organizational climate directly influence well-being of employees, support to improve their job satisfaction and commitment [53]. Superior behavior [26,30,54]; co-workers' behavior, [55]; job itself, [55]; physical conditions, [30,55]; teaching load, [33,54,55]; research facilities, [33,54,55]; administrative duties, [54,55]; academic environment, [33,54,55]; freedom, [30, 55]; and job security, [30,55]; support this proposition.

H4: Perceived Organizational Climate Stimulus has a negative effect on Stress

There is a close relationship between values and the work climate [56]. Work climate was one of the areas that caused stress among workers [56,57]. Stress in higher education increased due to climate factors [58,59]. This proposition directly supports the viewpoints of Kinman [33] by highlighting that policies, demand for scholarly practices, administrative duties are among the major causes for job stress.

H5: Psychological Stimulus has a positive effect on Happiness

Psychological stimulation has a positive effect on happiness. Personality, motivation, and organizational commitment are considered psychological stimulation for this study. This proposition is in line with the findings of DeNeve and Cooper [60]; Kodithuwakku, [38]; Ramachandran et al. [41]; Porter & Steers [61] and Zeinabadi, [39].

H6: Psychological Stimulus has a negative effect on Stress

In recent years, many researchers identified how personality, lack of organizational commitment, and the lack of motivation affect stress. Watson & Clark [62]; Barnes, Agago, & Coombs. [63]; Blix, et al. [64]; Salami [65]; Archibong, et al. [66]; Khurshid, et al. [67]; Ofoegbu and Nwadiani [68]; and Akbar & Akhter [69] are some of the scholars who confirmed this proposition.

H7: Environmental Stimulus has a positive effect on Scholarly Practices in Private HEIs

Academicians' practices to maintain high scholarly status depend on external environmental stimulation. Globalization is one of the factors as identified by this study that describes academicians' senses on how international interaction support for their scholarly practices. Academicians' perception of the Ministry of Higher Education, government, the University Grants Commission as well as other public sectors institutional support for their scholarly practices are also considered as significant factors for their scholarly practices. The final factor was identified as quality assurance & accreditation policies of the universities. National and international quality assurance systems of a given country would support scholarly practices of its universities and HEIs. A research fund alone is not sufficient to conduct research but intervention from external bodies like the government is more important to conduct scholarly work [70].

H8: Perceived Organizational Climate Stimulus has a positive effect on Scholarly Practices in Private HEIs

This proposition is supported by the findings of Selamat, et al. [71]; Maurice [72], and Princhar & Karasick [73] highlight that organizational climate has a direct and favorable effect on the work of academicians and finally on their performance. Bhat, [74]; Okoli, [75]; Gudeta, [76], and Derakhshani, Ghasemzadeh, & Branch [77] concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between organizational climate and job performance among academics.

H9: Psychological Stimulus has a positive effect on Scholarly Practices in Private HEIs

Psychological well-being has a direct and strong influence on academician's job performance [78]. This proposition is supported by Benjamin & Catherine [79]; Hashim & Mahmood [80]; Abouserie [81] and Aziz, et al., [82]. These researchers highlighted that academicians' psychological stimulation has a direct impact on their job performance.

H10: Happiness has a positive mediating effect on Scholarly Practices in Private HEIs

There is a popular proposition that "happier workers are productive workers". It is stated that

happy employees, whose needs are satisfied in their workplace, have greater performance than unhappy employees. Warr [83] and Rego [84] strongly supported this proposition. Crede, et al. [43]; Iverson, et al. [44]; Wright & Cropanzano [85]; Geoffrey [40]; Hijazi, Kasim, & Daud [86] and Van et al. [45] also supported this hypothesis.

H11: Stress has a negative mediating effect on Scholarly Practices in Private HEIs

Job stress could be directly or indirectly lead to reduce employees' feelings of satisfaction as well as their performance [77]. Cropanzano, et al. [87]; Halbesleben & Bowler, [88], and Janssen, et al. [89] exposed that emotional fatigue has a negative impact on job performance. Usoro & Etuk, [90]; Barkhuizen, & Rothmann, [91]; Fako [92]; Joseph, et al. [93]; Palagolla & Wickramasinghe, [94]; Reddy & Poornima [95]; Aroosiyah & Hussain [96] and Usman, et al. [97] are some of the researchers' whose findings were in favor of this proposition.

H12: Demographic Factors make differences in the Scholarly Practices in Private HEIs

Rajapakshe [55] revealed that demographic factors have an impact on academicians' scholarly practices. Their academic performance and the intention to conduct scholarly works vary with age, gender, marital status, experience and academic rank. Abdulla & Shaw, [98]; Chughtai & Zafar, [99]; Iqbal, [100] and Mutuku, et al. [101] are also in favor of this proposition.

7. CONCLUSION

The conceptual framework proposed in this study provides a broader understanding of the factors affecting scholarly practices among university lecturers in private HEIs in Sri Lanka. This study synthesizes ideas from past literature, develops a set of cohesive twelve testable hypotheses. The proposed conceptual framework shows the relationship between various determinant factors of scholarly practices with two intervening variables.

Environmental stimulus, perceived organizational culture stimulus and psychological stimulus have been selected as important variables that determine the scholarly practices in private HEIs, which could be directly as well as indirectly intervene with stress and happiness of academicians' performance. Further, this

framework proposes an outline to implement public policy on a strategic approach, to solve the issues prevalent in the private HEIs in Sri Lanka.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is based on data collected from the past literature and focuses only on three direct independent variables and two intervening variables that impact scholarly practices in Sri Lanka. The past literature used for this study has not paid much attention to homogenous sampling which generally concerns the analysis regarding a similar type of organization. Hence, a literature gap can be identified in this regard. The sample used for the present study is heterogeneous. As such, findings confirmed by this study contributes to the literature gap. For further research, the hypotheses developed for the study can be tested empirically.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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