

# Overview of the British Academy of Management small research grant



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2023 – 2024 BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grants Scheme can be considered the British Academy's most popular scheme in terms of applications received and awards made and one of the Academy's most prominent programmes with awards made to academics working in around 100 institutions around the UK. The BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grants have established themselves as one of the Academy's highest-profile programmes. These awards are intended to cover the expenses associated with a defined research project up to £10,000 in value and tenable for 24 months.

## Project Background

Teachers have historically dominated educational systems, especially in developing countries. There is a clear gap between university education systems in South Asia, particularly those centred around teachers and in addressing some real-world issues through education. There is a complex interplay between traditional norms and modern pressures regarding education in Sri Lanka and India. Although contemporary pedagogical practices are evident, they are not without challenges. Even though there is a growing interest in self-directed learning and a move toward student-centric learning, Sri Lankan and Indian students still have a traditional classroom learning process led by instructors.

As higher education evolves, self-directed learning (SDL) is at the forefront of this paradigm shift. The Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of SDL and the need for students to develop agentic competencies as part of their learning. Due to the challenges associated with the digital age,

globalisation, and the increasing emphasis on lifelong learning, the importance of SDL has been magnified simultaneously. This approach equips learners with the skills to navigate the ever-evolving knowledge landscape and fosters a sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation, vital qualities for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner.

Though the global conversation on SDL is comprehensive, it neglects the distinct challenges and opportunities in developing nations. In these countries, limited educational resources and opportunities hinder SDL's widespread adoption. For example, countries with collectivistic cultures, such as Sri Lanka (Collectivism=65), demonstrate cultural values emphasising communal learning in a classroom setting and may resist the individualistic nature of SDL. Similarly, in high power distance cultures indicating hierarchical societies, e.g., India (Power distance=77), the traditional role of the teacher as the primary knowledge imparter might conflict with the SDL approach, where the learner takes charge of their own education.

Grande et al. (2022) highlight the necessity of understanding the distinctive characteristics of individual nations when addressing SDL and that there has been a lack of substantial research into SDL readiness from an Asian perspective. There is a significant gap in the current literature, which is highlighted by this oversight. As a result of the current recognition of SDL's transformative potential in reshaping educational outcomes, an appreciation of its dynamics in the context of developing nations becomes increasingly important. Rather than relying on organisational training initiatives alone, employees

in these regions need to cultivate SDL skills and foster a proactive learning attitude to compete with Western counterparts. Since the education system globally was affected by the pandemic, it is unclear whether the Covid-19 situation enabled or hindered the implementation of SDL. It is not just about individual growth but also about contributing to broader economic development. This study aims to fill this gap in current literature by providing a nuanced perspective from emerging contexts and enriching the SDL discourse theoretically as a result.

## A brief overview of the research team profile

**Dr. Isuru Koswatte:** He is an assistant professor of business and management at the University of the West of Scotland, specialising in organisational resilience, entrepreneurship, and business sustainability, with active international collaborative research. Recently won the UWS Vice Chancellor's Studentship award in 2023 as well as the UWS Crucible Research competition for his outstanding commitment. He is also an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at NSBM Green University. He completed his PhD at 27 from the University of Manchester and is skilled in Mixed Method Research, Structure Equation Modelling, and qualitative research.

**Dr. Sabiha Mumtaz:** She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wollongong in Dubai. She is a highly qualified academic, having been bestowed several awards and recognitions throughout her time at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), including a Gold Medal for her MBA (scoring 99.47) in the National Percentile test of MBAs conducted by the All-

India Management Association, a ranking comprising candidates from various management colleges across India.

**Professor Christian Harrison:** He is a Professor of Leadership and Enterprise at the University of Bolton. Before joining the University of Bolton, he was a Reader in Leadership and the Chair of the Staff Forum for Research of the University of the West of Scotland, United Kingdom. He graduated with a First-class degree in Pharmacy and practised as a pharmacist, assuming managerial positions before moving into the Management field. Prof. Christian Harrison has an MBA and was the valedictorian of the University of Aberdeen Business School MBA class with Distinction. He is a recognised expert on leadership and provides regular expert media commentary on Scottish Television News (STV), Scotland Tonight.

**Dr. Nirma Jayawardena:** She is an assistant professor of marketing at Bradford University, UK. She completed PhD in Marketing and a Graduate Diploma in Business Research from Griffith University, Australia. She has published her work in prestigious journals and has received several national and international awards, grants, and scholarships.

**Shehani Joseph:** She is a lecturer in business and management at NSBM Green University. She has completed her MBA from Teesside University. In addition to her teaching role, she is an active researcher in entrepreneurship, self-esteem, leadership, and business psychology. She is presently the mistress-in-charge of the entrepreneurial circle and the dynamic society building future entrepreneurs.

*Contributed by: Dr. Isuru Koswatte*