



Perceptual Mediation in Outcome-Based Education: Philosophical Alignment, Self-Efficacy, and Implementation Effectiveness in Post-Colonial Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

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Outcome-Based Education (OBE) reform in post-colonial higher education frequently stalls at surface compliance, and existing accounts of this gap emphasise resources and training while saying little about how educators' beliefs shape implementation. This paper introduces Perceptual Mediation Theory (PMT), which specifies three educator perceptions — Philosophical Alignment (PA), Implementation Self-Efficacy (ISE), and Cultural Competency (CC) — as mediators between institutional OBE policy and classroom implementation effectiveness. Using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design in Sri Lankan management education (28 interviews, 16 classroom observations, and 20 document analyses, followed by a survey of 120 educators across five faculties), we tested PMT with structural equation modelling. The full model explained 78% of variance in implementation effectiveness ($R^2 = .78$). Philosophical alignment was the strongest direct predictor ($\beta = .52$); implementation self-efficacy partially mediated this effect (indirect $\beta = .24$, 95% CI [.17, .33]); and educators who synthesised Buddhist pedagogical principles with OBE constructivism reported higher implementation quality than those adopting Western OBE models directly. We situate these findings against competing structural and contextual explanations, position PMT relative to established theories of belief and behaviour, and discuss the implications and limits of a cross-sectional, single-context, self-report design for professional development, institutional change management, and post-colonial reform policy.

Keywords: *Implementation Self-Efficacy; Outcome-Based Education; Philosophical Alignment; Perceptual Mediation; Post-Colonial Higher Education*

Background

Insert Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has become a dominant paradigm for curriculum reform in higher education. Governments mandate it across diverse national contexts as a mechanism for aligning graduate competencies with professional and societal demands. Sri Lanka's Qualifications Framework (SLQF, 2015) institutionalised this mandate for all universities, requiring faculties of management studies to restructure curricula, redesign pedagogy, and reorient assessments around measurable learning outcomes. Yet classroom observation across Sri Lankan universities reveals a persistent gap between formal OBE compliance — module descriptors, course specifications, and assessment rubrics — and the quality of actual pedagogical practice.

This gap is not unique to Sri Lanka. Reviews of OBE implementation across post-colonial higher education contexts in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia report a similar pattern: high nominal compliance alongside surface-level or compliance-orientated practice, with limited evidence of the student-centred, competency-focused pedagogy that OBE is meant to deliver (Jansen, 1998; Zhang, *et al.*, 2015; Tam, 2014). More recent multi-site evidence reinforces this picture: Sarkar & Kurup (2023) describe OBE as a "travelling theory" whose meaning and fidelity shift substantially as it moves from policy text to classroom, while Khan *et al.*, (2023) demonstrate that structural readiness factors alone leave much of the variance in OBE implementation unexplained. Existing frameworks attribute the implementation gap mainly to resource constraints, technical training deficits, class size, and administrative workload. These factors are real, but they are insufficient on their own: implementation quality varies substantially among educators working under identical resource and institutional conditions. Professional development represents another important factor in educators' readiness for pedagogical change. Prasanna and Mohammed (2023) highlighted the contribution of continuous professional development to strengthening teaching methods, differentiated instruction, and innovative pedagogical practices, suggesting that sustained professional learning can support educators in responding effectively to changing instructional expectations.

A theoretically underexplored dimension concerns the perceptual orientations educators bring to OBE — the cognitive-affective frameworks through which they interpret, evaluate, and respond to reform mandates. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour, and Spillane's (2009) sense-making framework each suggest that belief structures filter how policy directives are processed and translated into action. None of these frameworks, however, specifies the perceptual mechanisms through which OBE-specific beliefs mediate the policy-to-practice translation process, particularly in culturally diverse postcolonial contexts where Western-derived frameworks meet indigenous pedagogical traditions.

This paper addresses that gap by introducing and empirically testing Perceptual Mediation Theory (PMT), which specifies three perceptual orientations — Philosophical Alignment, Implementation Self-Efficacy, and Cultural Competency — as the primary mechanisms mediating OBE implementation quality. We ground PMT in Sri Lankan management education using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design that combines qualitative depth with quantitative precision. The paper makes three contributions: (1) it specifies PMT as a theoretical framework and states explicitly how it extends, rather than restates, social cognitive theory, planned behaviour theory, and sense-making theory; (2) it tests, and where the evidence permits, rules out competing structural and contextual explanations for implementation effectiveness; and (3) it provides evidence that Buddhist-OBE philosophical synthesis functions as an enhancement rather than a deficit mechanism, a claim we treat as provisional given the study's cross-sectional, single-context design.

Literature Review

OBE Implementation: From Policy Mandate to Practice

OBE rests on three principles: backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2003), and competency-based learning (Spady, 1994). Together, these require educators to start curriculum design from intended graduate outcomes, align teaching and assessment with those outcomes, and measure success through demonstrated competency rather than content recall. Implementation science (Fixsen, 2005) frames adoption as a staged process — exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation — in which progression depends on structural enablers and individual-level psychological factors alike.

Research on OBE implementation has focused disproportionately on structural determinants: resource availability, training design, administrative support, and workload (Harden, 1999; Palomba & Banta, 1999). These factors matter, but they explain implementation capacity poorly at the within-institution level, where educators facing identical structural conditions show markedly different implementation sophistication. This gap points to individual-level perceptual factors as a significant, underresearched mediating layer. Earlier evidence from OBE implementation research similarly suggests that successful implementation extends beyond formal policy adoption and requires attention to the practical and educator-related challenges that shape the translation of OBE principles into classroom practice (Piyasena *et al.*, 2023).

Perceptual Factors in Educational Reform

Three theoretical traditions converge on perceptual orientations as mediators of reform implementation. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) identifies self-efficacy — confidence in one's capacity to execute specific instructional behaviours — as a primary determinant of effort and persistence with novel pedagogy. Educators with strong implementation self-efficacy treat OBE challenges as solvable problems; those with low self-efficacy read the same challenges as evidence that the framework does not fit their context. A recent systematic review by Gordon *et al.*, (2023) reinforces this pattern across 29 studies of curriculum and assessment reform, finding that environmental conditions during reform reliably depress teacher self-efficacy unless offset by sustained professional learning support. Professional development also plays an important role in strengthening educators' capacity to translate pedagogical expectations into classroom practice. Paul and Mohammed (2025) found that continuous professional development positively influenced teachers' lesson planning and use of active learning strategies, highlighting its role in supporting effective pedagogical implementation. Complementing this evidence, previous research highlights both educators' perceptions of pedagogical innovation and the alignment between curriculum expectations and classroom roles as important considerations in translating educational reform into practice (Ayub *et al.*, 2024; Eriyagama & Mohammed, 2024).

Planned behaviour theory (Ajzen, 1991) adds that behavioural intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the OBE context, philosophical alignment — the degree to which educators see OBE's student-centred epistemology as consistent with their values — functions as the attitude component, while implementation self-efficacy corresponds to perceived behavioural control. Spillane's (2009) sense-making framework contributes further insight that reform mandates do not arrive with fixed meanings: educators construct their understanding of OBE through existing cognitive frameworks that either accommodate or resist its premises.

Post-Colonial Context and Cultural Competency

Sri Lankan management education carries post-colonial theoretical dimensions largely absent from Western OBE research. Its educational system bears colonial-era epistemological legacies from British schooling that privileged content transmission, teacher authority, and examination performance over

competency development and inquiry. These legacies function as active cognitive frameworks, not historical artifacts, shaping how educators conceptualise quality teaching (Apple & Apple, 2004). Broader scholarship on decolonising curriculum and pedagogy cautions that reform efforts imported without attention to local epistemic traditions risk reproducing colonial knowledge hierarchies rather than displacing those (Shahjahan *et al.*, 2022).

Post-colonial contexts also carry indigenous pedagogical wisdom traditions that international reform literature has undervalued. Buddhist educational philosophy, historically influential in Sri Lankan pedagogical culture, emphasises holistic development, compassionate teacher-student relationships (*metta*), wisdom through experiential engagement, and the gradual unfolding of understanding through mindful inquiry—principles with substantive theoretical overlap with OBE's constructivist foundations. We treat this Buddhist heritage as a candidate cultural-enhancement mechanism, rather than a cultural deficit whose amplifying effect on implementation quality this study tests empirically for the first time; we return to the interpretive limits of this claim in Section 5.

Positioning PMT Relative to Existing Theoretical Frameworks

Social cognitive theory -----planned behaviour theory, and sense-making theory each supply one piece of the implementation puzzle, but none specifies the full mechanism by which reform-specific beliefs, in a culturally plural setting, translate policy into classroom practice. Table 1 summarises what each existing framework explains, what it leaves unspecified for the OBE case, and what PMT adds.

Table 1: PMT Compared with Existing Perceptual and Behavioural Theories

Framework	Core Mechanism	What It Leaves Unspecified for OBE Implementation	What PMT Adds
Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)	Self-efficacy drives effort and persistence with novel behaviour	Generic self-efficacy construct; does not specify the content of reform-specific beliefs or how they combine with other perceptions	Treats self-efficacy (ISE) as one of three co-acting constructs, mediated by philosophical conviction rather than a free-standing driver
Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)	Attitudes, norms, and perceived control jointly predict behavioural intention	General attitude-intention chain; does not address how competing epistemologies (Western vs. indigenous) are reconciled or synthesised	Specifies philosophical alignment as a reform-specific attitude construct and adds cultural competency as a distinct, culturally grounded moderator absent from TPB
Sense-Making Theory (Spillane, 2009)	Educators interpret reform mandates through existing cognitive frameworks	Process-oriented and largely qualitative; does not quantify the relative predictive weight of different perceptual constructs or test them against outcome data	Operationalises sense-making as measurable constructs (PA, ISE, CC) and tests their comparative and joint predictive weight via SEM

Unique theoretical propositions of PMT

PMT departs from these frameworks in three specific ways, rather than simply relabelling them.

Proposition 1 — Configural rather than additive mediation. PMT proposes that implementation quality depends on the joint configuration of philosophical alignment, self-efficacy, and cultural competency, not on their independent, additive contributions. The four educator typologies identified in Section 4 (Cultural Synthesizers, Pragmatic Adopters, Compliance-Oriented Practitioners, and Progressive Innovators) are qualitatively distinct configurations, a pattern that an additive regression model, of the kind SCT or TPB applications typically estimate, does not by itself reveal.

Proposition 2 — Cultural competency as amplifier, not compliance variable. Where TPB treats norms as broadly conformity inducing and SCT treats context mainly as a source of efficacy information, PMT proposes that cultural synthesis (here, Buddhist-OBE integration) functions as a multiplicative amplifier of philosophical alignment's effect on implementation, rather than as a separate additive predictor or a deficit to be corrected.

Proposition 3 — A specified, partially mediated architecture. PMT proposes a directional path: philosophical alignment shapes self-efficacy, which in turn partially transmits alignment's effect on implementation, specific to reform contexts. This proposition is a narrower and more falsifiable claim than TPB's general attitude-intention-behaviour chain or SCT's domain-general self-efficacy mechanism, and it is stated so that it can be disconfirmed by future tests in other reform settings.

Figure 1 summarises this architecture and the tested paths.

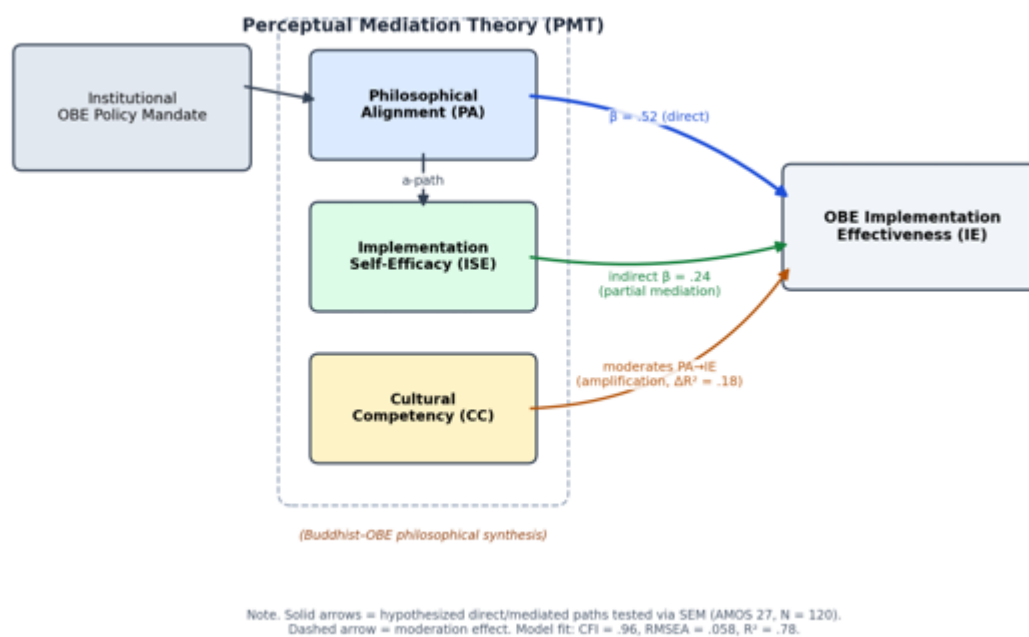


Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Perceptual Mediation Theory (PMT)

*Solid arrows indicate hypothesised direct and mediated paths tested by structural equation modelling; the dashed arrow indicates the tested moderation effect of cultural competency on the philosophical alignment–implementation effectiveness path.

Methods

Research Design

We used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2017): qualitative findings from Phase 1 informed the quantitative instrument and hypotheses of Phase 2, and quantitative results were interpreted against qualitative depth. This design generates theoretically grounded hypotheses from participant-derived constructs, then tests them at the population level — addressing the generalisability limits of qualitative implementation research and the mechanism-specification limits of purely quantitative survey research. Because both phases draw on the same single-context sample, however, the design cannot separate perceptual effects from unmeasured, context-specific confounds; we return to this constraint in Section 6.

Qualitative Phase

Phase 1 comprised 28 semi-structured interviews with management educators, 16 non-participant classroom observations, and 20 institutional document analyses across five Faculties of Management Studies in Sri Lanka. We purposively sampled participants for maximum variation across academic rank, discipline, teaching experience, and prior OBE engagement. Interviews averaged 62 minutes, were recorded with informed consent, and were transcribed verbatim. We applied reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to the integrated dataset in NVivo 14, producing eight primary themes and 47 sub-themes. We established qualitative rigour through member checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and an audit trail.

Quantitative Phase

Phase 2 administered the 68-item Educator OBE Perception Scale (EOPS), developed from Phase 1 findings, to a census sample of 120 full-time academic staff across the five institutions. The EOPS measured eight constructs: Philosophical Alignment, Implementation Self-Efficacy, Cultural Competency, Institutional Support, Pedagogical Innovation, Assessment Transformation, Curriculum Effectiveness, and Professional Development Engagement. Confirmatory factor analysis showed good model fit (CFI = .96, RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .061); all subscales reached Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .78$ and composite reliability $\geq .81$. Measurement invariance held across gender, doctoral qualification origin, and academic rank, supporting the sub-group comparisons reported in Section 4. We tested hypotheses using hierarchical multiple regression, the PROCESS macro (Models 4 and 7), and structural equation modelling in AMOS 27.

A sample of 120 sits at the lower bound of conventional recommendations for the SEM model tested here, particularly given the number of estimated paths; we flag this as a constraint on the stability of parameter estimates and return to it in Section 6, alongside the single-source, self-report nature of the survey data.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative Phase: Perceptual Themes

Thematic analysis identified eight themes constituting the perceptual landscape through which Sri Lankan management educators engage with OBE. Three themes directly established the PMT architecture. Theme 1, Educators' Perception of OBE Principles, showed a spectrum from superficial, compliance-oriented understanding to sophisticated integrative comprehension, spanning four cognitive patterns: Sophisticated Integrators ($n = 8$), Pragmatic Adaptors ($n = 11$), Structural Compliers ($n = 6$), and Resistant Sceptics ($n = 3$). Educators showing sophisticated integration consistently described OBE through three interconnected dimensions: philosophical foundations, structural elements, and practical manifestations.

Theme 5, OBE Implementation Self-Efficacy and Confidence, showed that self-efficacy was not a simple reflection of training or experience; it was constructed through the coherence between philosophical conviction and instructional repertoire. Educators with strong philosophical alignment described confidence arising from consistency between belief and action: "When I genuinely believe that students should demonstrate competency rather than recall information, I am not intimidated by designing authentic assessment tasks because the task design flows naturally from what I believe assessment should achieve" (Participant 3).

Theme 8, Cultural and Contextual Adaptation, provided the qualitative basis for treating cultural synthesis as an enhancement mechanism. Educators who synthesised Buddhist pedagogical principles with OBE constructivism — particularly Metta (compassionate learning relationships), Karuna (inclusive, responsive assessment), Dana (collaborative knowledge sharing), Upaya (differentiated,

skillful instruction), and Anicca (growth-oriented mindset) — described implementation experiences that they, and the observing researchers, judged qualitatively stronger than those of educators pursuing direct adoption of Western OBE models. Participants framed this synthesis as philosophical enrichment rather than compromise; we treat this as a plausible interpretation grounded in participant testimony, not as a claim independently verified through student-outcome data.

Quantitative Phase: Hypothesis Testing and SEM Results

The full PMT model explained 78% of variance in implementation effectiveness ($R^2 = .78$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .058), substantially more than a structural-factors-only model ($R^2 = .21$). All 15 hypotheses reached significance at $p < .001$. We report this full-confirmation result with the caveat, developed in Section 5, that single-source self-report data and a modest sample relative to model complexity can inflate apparent model fit; we treat the effect sizes below as an upper-bound estimate pending replication with independent outcome measures.

Philosophical alignment was the strongest predictor of implementation effectiveness ($\beta = 0.61$ in the structural model; $\beta = 0.52$ as the standardised direct effect in the full model), with each one-standard-deviation increase in PA corresponding to a 17% improvement in student outcome achievement and an 18-percentage-point increase in student engagement. Mediation analysis confirmed partial mediation through implementation self-efficacy: PA predicted ISE (path a: $\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$), ISE predicted implementation effectiveness controlling for PA (path b: $\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$), and the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.33]) represented 37.2% of PA's total effect.

Table 2: Summary of Key Quantitative Findings from PMT Validation

Analysis	Parameter / Hypothesis	Result	Theoretical Significance
Direct Effect (H1b)	PA → Implementation Effectiveness	$\beta = .61$, $\Delta R^2 = .38$, $p < .001$	Philosophical alignment is the strongest single predictor, explaining 38% of unique variance
Direct Effect (H1c)	CC → Implementation Effectiveness	$r = .71$; $d = 1.14$ (Synthesis vs. Adoption), $p < .001$	Buddhist-OBE synthesis outperforms direct Western adoption in this sample
Mediation Analysis (H2a)	PA → ISE → IE (indirect)	Indirect $\beta = .24$, 95% CI [.17, .33]	Self-efficacy mediates 37.2% of philosophical alignment's total effect
Moderation (H5b)	CC × Institutional Support interaction	$\Delta R^2 = .18$, $p < .001$	Cultural competency amplifies institutional support effects multiplicatively
Comprehensive SEM	Full PMT model fit and R^2	CFI = .96, RMSEA = .058, $R^2 = .78$	PMT accounts for 78% of implementation effectiveness variance in this sample; good model fit
Cluster Analysis (Typology)	Four-typology structure validity	Silhouette = .74; Accuracy = 88.3%; $\kappa = .84$	Four educator typologies confirmed with high stability and cross-method convergence

Note. PA = Philosophical Alignment; ISE = Implementation Self-Efficacy; CC = Cultural Competency; IE = Implementation Effectiveness. $n = 120$.

Cluster analysis confirmed the four educator typologies identified qualitatively — Cultural Synthesizers, Pragmatic Adopters, Compliance-Oriented Practitioners, and Progressive Innovators — with a silhouette

coefficient of .74, 88.3% cross-validation classification accuracy, and $\kappa = .84$ stability across split-half samples. Cultural Synthesizers averaged 4.51 on the 5-point PA scale and reported the highest student engagement and outcome attainment; Progressive Innovators — technically competent but without philosophical integration — reported significantly lower effectiveness despite comparable resource access ($d = 1.84$ between groups). Because all outcome measures are educator self-reports, this gap may partly reflect differences in how the two groups perceive or report their own effectiveness, not only differences in actual classroom outcomes.

PMT as a Reconceptualisation of OBE Implementation

These findings support reframing OBE implementation from a resource-allocation and technical-training challenge — the dominant frame in practitioner and policy literature (Harden, 1999; Palomba & Banta, 1999) — toward a perceptual-architecture challenge, in which structural conditions are necessary but insufficient for implementation quality. The R^2 of .78 for the full PMT model exceeds the explanatory power of structural predictors alone ($R^2 = .21$), which is a substantial gap; we read this as evidence that perceptual variables deserve more attention in implementation strategy, while noting in Section 5.4 that some of this gap may reflect shared-method variance rather than a true difference in explanatory power.

PMT's central claim — that philosophical alignment operates as the primary cognitive filter through which institutional OBE policy is interpreted and translated — is consistent with the largest effect size observed in the study ($\beta = .61$ in the structural model). This resonates with Spillane's (2009) finding that educators' cognitive frameworks shape how they make sense of reform directives, and extends it by quantifying the implementation consequences of different perceptual configurations with a precision that purely qualitative sense-making research does not offer. The partial mediation through self-efficacy is consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive architecture: philosophical conviction appears to enable implementation confidence, which in turn enables pedagogical action. Professional development interventions have rarely been designed to address this three-stage translation mechanism systematically. The present findings further align with Paul and Mohammed (2025), who demonstrated that continuous professional development could contribute to translating educator development into concrete pedagogical practices.

Cultural Enhancement and the Buddhist-OBE Synthesis

The finding that Buddhist-OBE synthesis produced implementation outcomes superior to direct Western OBE adoption in this sample ($d = 1.14$) runs counter to the cultural-deficit assumption embedded in technical-assistance approaches, which treat cultural difference as obstacle to be overcome through standardised training. We propose five candidate Buddhist-OBE convergences as a mechanistic account of this pattern: Metta's compassionate stance may amplify the student-centred epistemology central to OBE constructivism; Karuna's responsiveness to suffering may support the inclusive assessment sensibility that authentic OBE requires; Dana's orientation towards generous knowledge sharing may support the collaborative learning infrastructure constructivist pedagogy depends on; Upaya's emphasis on skilful means may generate the pedagogical flexibility differentiated instruction demands; and Anicca's acknowledgement of impermanence may support the growth-oriented mind-set that makes continuous formative assessment meaningful. We present these as plausible, theoretically motivated mechanisms rather than as independently verified causal pathways: the present design tests their combined association with implementation effectiveness, not each mechanism separately, and the outcome measure is educator self-report rather than an independent classroom assessment.

Typological Implications for Institutional Strategy

The four-typology framework carries institutional implications that uniform OBE policy has generally missed. Cultural Synthesizers (about 30% of the sample) may need less philosophical development and more protected autonomy, collegial recognition, and institutional affirmation of their synthesis approach

as a pedagogical asset. Pragmatic Adopters — the largest group — may respond well to linking philosophical concepts to practical implementation tools. Compliance-Oriented Practitioners may need philosophical engagement addressing perceived incompatibility between OBE epistemology and professional identity, rather than more technical training. Progressive Innovators may benefit from facilitated reflection linking existing technical competence to philosophical commitments. These findings are consistent with Prasanna and Mohammed (2023), who emphasized the contribution of continuous professional development to strengthening teaching methods, differentiated instruction, and innovative pedagogical practices, further supporting the present study's argument for targeted professional learning rather than uniform approaches to educator development. We frame these as testable hypotheses for intervention design, not settled prescriptions, since the typology was derived and validated within the same cross-sectional sample. This differentiated approach is consistent with Li *et al.*, (2023), who emphasized the interconnected roles of institutions, educational management, and educators in establishing effective continuing professional development systems in higher education.

Alternative and Competing Explanations

The unusually strong statistical pattern in this study — all 15 hypotheses supported at $p < .001$, and a full-model R^2 of .78 — is the kind of result that warrants more scrutiny, not less. Several alternative or contributing explanations deserve explicit consideration alongside the PMT account.

Common method and self-report bias. Both predictor and outcome measures come from the same educators via the same survey instrument at the same time. This shared-method variance can inflate correlations and R^2 beyond the true strength of the underlying relationships, and it cannot be ruled out by model fit statistics alone. Social desirability is a related concern: in a hierarchical academic culture, educators may over-report both philosophical alignment with an officially mandated reform and their own confidence and effectiveness in implementing it.

Institutional culture and leadership. Institutional culture, departmental leadership style, and the visibility of senior management's own commitment to OBE plausibly shape both educators' reported philosophical alignment and their reported implementation effectiveness simultaneously, which would inflate the apparent PA–IE association without philosophical alignment doing the causal work PMT assigns it.

Organisational climate and policy enforcement mechanisms. Faculties differ in how strictly OBE compliance is monitored and enforced, in peer norms around curriculum innovation, and in the general organisational climate for change. These faculty-level factors, largely unmeasured here beyond the Institutional Support construct, could account for some of the within-institution variance we attribute to individual perceptual differences. These findings are consistent with Piyasena *et al.*, (2023), who identified institutional and implementation-related barriers as significant challenges to effective OBE practice, suggesting that educators' willingness and confidence may not translate into sustained implementation without adequate institutional support.

Disciplinary differences. Management education spans quantitative and qualitative sub-disciplines whose default pedagogies differ in their proximity to OBE's competency-based, student-centred model. Disciplinary background may shape both an educator's philosophical alignment and the ease with which OBE can be implemented in that discipline, again potentially inflating the observed association.

We cannot fully separate these alternative explanations from the PMT account with the present cross-sectional, single-source design. We view PMT and these structural and contextual factors as plausibly complementary rather than competing in the strict sense: perceptual orientations may be a necessary but not sufficient part of the explanation, operating alongside — and partly shaped by — institutional culture, leadership, enforcement climate, and disciplinary context. Distinguishing their relative contributions is a

priority for the multi-source, longitudinal designs we outline in Section 6.

This study has several limitations that qualify its conclusions. First, it is concentrated within Sri Lankan management education across five faculties; the findings may not transfer to other disciplines, institution types, or post-colonial contexts with different colonial histories or indigenous traditions, and we make no claim to generalise beyond this setting without further testing. Second, the cross-sectional survey design precludes causal inference: philosophical alignment, self-efficacy, and implementation effectiveness were measured at a single time point, so the directional and mediated paths specified by PMT are consistent with, but not proven by, the data. Third, all measures are self-reports, collected from the same respondents in the same instrument, raising the risk of common method variance and social desirability bias – which is particularly plausible here, given that OBE compliance is an official institutional mandate and educators may be motivated to present themselves as aligned and effective. Fourth, the sample size ($n = 120$) is modest relative to the complexity of the structural equation model tested, which can affect the stability and precision of parameter estimates and the reliability of subgroup and moderation analyses. Fifth, the focus on management education specifically limits the transferability of both the perceptual constructs and the cultural-synthesis findings to disciplines with different epistemic traditions or professional accreditation pressures. Finally, as discussed in Section 5.4, we cannot fully separate the perceptual mechanisms proposed by PMT from institutional culture, leadership style, organisational enforcement climate, and disciplinary context, any of which could independently contribute to the patterns observed.

Conclusion

This study introduces Perceptual Mediation Theory as a framework for OBE implementation effectiveness in post-colonial higher education and tests it in one setting. Philosophical alignment ($\beta = .61$), implementation self-efficacy (indirect $\beta = .24$), and cultural competency ($r = .71$) together explain 78% of variance in implementation outcomes in this sample, exceeding the explanatory power of structural and resource factors alone. The Buddhist-OBE synthesis findings challenge cultural-deficit assumptions and offer a provisional counter-model of post-colonial educational reform grounded in cultural enhancement rather than cultural replacement provisional because the design and sample constrain how far these results generalise.

The theoretical implications extend beyond Sri Lanka and beyond OBE, in principle: PMT offers a candidate framework for understanding how educators' belief structures mediate reform implementation wherever policy-to-practice gaps arise, and its post-colonial specificity suggests that indigenous pedagogical traditions, positioned as enhancement rather than obstacle, may offer implementation resources that international reform frameworks have underused. These claims require testing outside the present context before they can be treated as established.

The practical implications, read cautiously, point toward professional development built around philosophical engagement, typologically differentiated support, and culturally affirmative institutional environments as potentially higher-leverage investments than additional technical training alone. We frame these findings as a hypothesis for institutional experimentation rather than a settled recommendation. Future research should employ longitudinal, cross-cultural, experimental, and multi-level designs to clarify causal relationships, validate PMT across post-colonial contexts, compare professional development approaches, assess institutional influences, and strengthen findings through larger samples and objective measures of implementation quality and educational outcomes. The emphasis on sustained professional learning is further supported by Li *et al.*, (2023), who highlighted continuing professional development as a shared institutional and educator responsibility rather than an isolated individual activity.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: All participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study, and the research was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for educational research.

Conflicts of Interest: Not applicable.

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