

## Editorial

### Promoting Professional Practice in Education through Innovative Thinking

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the "*Journal of Innovative Practices in Education*" (JIPE), a new forum dedicated to sharing advancing research and discourse in innovative thinking and practices in education. Our aim is to promote teaching, research, and scholarship in professional practice of education and educators through insights gained from research related to innovative thinking in educational practices and the professional development of practitioners, at different levels and in a variety of contexts. In our first Issue, we are excited to share with you a selection of articles focusing on diverse perspectives and research findings comprising five research articles, two review articles, and a research communication. Reflecting our commitment to inclusivity as a trilingual journal, papers in English, Sinhala, and Tamil languages are presented. The transformative role of innovative thinking and practices in addressing the complex challenges within the education landscape are explored through the diverse articles in this issue.

Educational practices must be adaptable to prepare students for future challenges. Acknowledging the power of education to bring about significant changes, the Global Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education (UNESCO, 2021) emphasizes the need to rethink the role of education and educators in reimagining innovative ways to face the challenges of an uncertain future. Innovative practice results from innovative thinking. Innovative thinking is a catalyst for innovative educational practices as it encourages the exploration of new ideas and methods that can transform teaching and learning. Fostering innovative thinking in educational practices involves adopting novel pedagogies that

emphasize creativity, critical thinking, and student engagement (OECD, 2017). When educators think critically and creatively about the challenges they face, they are more likely to implement practices that go beyond traditional models and adapt to the diverse needs of students functioning as 'agents of change' (Fullan, 2016). Encouraging educators to explore creative strategies to enhance adaptability in teaching and learning to meet diverse student needs will transform traditional classrooms into dynamic learning environments that foster a deeper understanding and application of knowledge to face real life challenges.

Undoubtedly, innovative thinking and practices are essential in addressing various challenges across all educational levels and contexts. This Issue of *JIPE* brings together a diverse collection of research and perspectives that address some of the key issues in contemporary educational landscape—from higher education context to secondary education, early childhood education, teacher education, and inclusive education. We invite you to explore the diverse viewpoints presented in this issue and join us in reflecting on the transformative potential of innovative thinking in our shared intellectual journey.

While innovative thinking is essential for driving change, it must be supported by a conducive environment and appropriate professional development. For instance, the well-being of educators significantly affects their professional development and performance, which is the focus of the article "*Socioeconomic and Academic Dynamics that are Shaping Bachelor of Education Students' Well-being*", by Rana, Pervais, and Gupta. Their investigation of the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors and levels of well-being of prospective educators across six teacher education colleges in Jammu Division, India that examined well-being along multiple dimensions: physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual, provides a

holistic perspective, suggesting the need to address various factors that influence the well-being of B.Ed. students and their future teaching practices as educators. As highlighted in this article, establishing holistic support systems responsive to these diverse factors within higher educational institutions is important, which calls for innovative strategies to create conducive and nurturing professional development environments for future educators.

Innovative thinking in relation to professional practices is required at all levels of education starting from early childhood education. In the current digital age, where children are exposed to technology from a very young age, teachers must think innovatively about the careful integration of digital technologies to support their learning, preventing any negative effects. As highlighted in the article *"Impact of Electronic Media on Socio-emotional Development in Pre-school Children: Parents' Perception"* by Seneviratne, pre-school teachers have a key role to play in addressing parental concerns on the negative impacts of excessive media consumption by their children, particularly on social interaction and emotional regulation. The study calls for developing clear guidelines and innovative strategies for balanced media usage to support healthy socio-emotional growth of young children reflecting the need for well-designed interventions by teachers engaging with parents, taking a participatory approach.

Fostering creativity and adaptability in students is vital for preparing them for the future. The article (written in Sinhala), titled *"Developing Creativity and Adaptability Skills in Junior Secondary School Students"* by Irugalbandara discusses innovative pedagogical strategies and curricular innovations that can enhance these skills essential for students to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century, which requires innovative thinking of teachers. While innovative thinking is essential for driving change, it is the practical application of this thinking, supported by an appropriate learning environment, that leads to successful educational practices, as reflected in this study. The drama-based intervention reveals that innovative process drama techniques such as hot-seat, storytelling, and improvisation as effective means of developing skills such as creativity, collaboration, and problem solving among students. Integrating teaching strategies and techniques into classroom learning in unconventional, proactive, and creative ways can be recognized as innovative pedagogies. By providing such learning opportunities and valuing creative processes, educators can cultivate an environment that promotes adaptability and creative thinking, essential for students' future success.

Similarly, employing innovative educational practices to foster creativity among senior-secondary school students is equally important. In her article "*Life of Pi as an Advanced Level Text: Teachers' Perceptions on Overcoming Challenges of Teaching Magic Realism*", Jayakody discusses innovative teaching methods used by teachers against the challenges they faced when teaching the text *Life of Pi* to G.C.E. A/L students, which is heavily influenced by 'Magic Realism', a novel genre that most students and teachers were unfamiliar with. Diverse strategies adopted by the participant teachers such as the integration of movies, role playing, mind mapping, thematic approaches, and debates to overcome various challenges they encountered reflect their commitment to fostering creativity and critical thinking among students. Nevertheless, adequate pedagogical training is essential for teachers to effectively implement innovative practices. Providing teachers with innovative professional development opportunities will enable them confidently navigating the challenges of teaching unfamiliar genres and fostering creative learning environments for their students.

Innovative thinking is a key driving force behind transformative practices in education, and the significant role played by teachers in this process should not be undermined. Often there is hidden, untapped potential within teachers which calls for strategies that will allow them to fully realize and develop their inherent teaching qualities. The review article "*The Latent Teacher*" explores the balance between innate and acquired skills, suggesting that unlocking this latent potential is essential for addressing prevalent educational challenges. The concept of 'latent potential' within teachers is intriguing and underscores the idea that every individual has inherent teaching qualities that can be developed. The need to 'awaken' the latent teachers, as argued by the author, highlights the necessity for continuous evolution in teaching strategies to address the dynamic and complex issues in the education system. By focusing on innovative strategies in teacher education initiatives and educational reforms, the educational system can unlock, develop, and sharpen the inherent teaching qualities of educators. This approach well-aligns with the broader goals of improving teaching effectiveness and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in educational practices.

Integrating innovative strategies and techniques into various methods of teaching such as collaborative learning and problem-based learning will foster vital qualities among students in any educational setting. Exploring the impact of collaborative learning and problem-based learning on character development in open and distance education, Dissanayake presents a review, specifically focusing on the development of learners' cognitive, metacognitive, social,

emotional, motivational, decision making and problem-solving skills, and their character. As suggested in the review, such pedagogical approaches provide ample opportunities for students in open and distance education contexts to develop essential character traits such as teamwork, critical thinking, empathy, responsibility, and ethical decision-making that will help them to optimize positive outcomes in their social, professional and work environments. Application of innovative pedagogical approaches by educators in open and distance education institutions will kindle innovative behaviour among adult learners through which new ideas are generated, developed, and promoted, thus enabling them to become effective professionals demonstrating innovative work behaviour involving application of novel methodologies to find creative solutions to persisting issues.

Innovative thinking and practices in education also promote inclusivity. Two articles in this edition focus on promoting inclusive practices in education. Firstly, the research article titled "*Changes in Stakeholders' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education Practices*" (written in Tamil) by Ketheeswaran, investigates the evolving attitudes of teachers, parents, and administrators towards inclusive education (IE), in the Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka. The reveal of mixed attitudes among the stakeholders including positive attitudes on the key practices of information provision for IE and student interactions in IE, and negative attitudes regarding the development of individual educational programmes for students with special educational needs, and the IE policy implies the need for awareness raising and capacity development on adopting appropriate IE practices.

Secondly, the concise research communication on *Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Inclusive Education in Plantation Sector Schools of Sri Lanka* by Dawson

highlights unique challenges and opportunities associated with implementing IE in Tamil medium schools of plantation sector in the Hatton educational zone. While providing context-specific insights into the challenges of implementing IE, it proposes an IE framework for plantation sector schools. Both these articles underscore the necessity to foster a more inclusive, and diverse classroom culture within the school system. Critical innovative thinking in educational practice is essential to move away from the traditional, one-size-fits-all teaching methods towards more flexible, responsive methods to accommodate diverse learner needs. This shift requires reimagining and adopting novel teaching approaches to ensure that student needs are met through individualized and adaptive teaching methods. Such practices are in line with current trends to foster greater inclusivity, personalization, and cultural responsiveness in education.

Collectively, the articles presented in this edition of *JIPE* reflect the vital need for innovative thinking and practices in education at different levels and contexts. The role of educators is becoming increasingly complex and challenging in the rapidly evolving educational landscape. As educational change agents, all educators must be innovative in their thinking and practices. Innovativeness implies the ability to think beyond boundaries and create novel approaches and strategies. Thus, educators need to be prepared to perform their expected roles effectively, which implies the crucial need for meaningful changes in educational policies and practices through innovative educational reforms and continuing professional development initiatives.

We hope that this inaugural issue of *JIPE* provides you with some thought-provoking perspectives via a broad spectrum of ideas that challenge traditional practices, encourage forward-thinking solutions, and inspire future innovative research. Enjoy reading!

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