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Public Libraries Today: A Case Study in Anuradhapura District Public Libraries in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries play a major role in gathering, indexing, circulation, storing and finally dissemination of knowledge to satisfy the information needs to the knowledge based society. Entire public libraries under the provincial councils, urban councils and local government authorities perform their maximum duties and cater to the needs of general public in the respective areas. There are thirty four (34) public libraries in the Anuradhapura District of the North Central Province (NCP). Two libraries remained closed during the data collection period. The researcher personally visited each library and a structured questionnaire was distributed among thirty two (32) library staff members to collect data by conducting in-depth interviews. Collected data were analyzed using Microsoft excel calculations and findings were presented accordingly. Fifty percent (50%) of public libraries in Anurdhapura district are managed by Library Assistants. Nineteen percent (19%) libraries are managed by Labourers (Marga Kamkaru) indicating that they do not have a subject knowledge and administration powers especially under local government authorities. The research also found that there is no any public library staff recruited or promoted within the last fifteen years in NCP. Authorities should identify these lacks and follow immediate actions to recruit qualified staff to the public libraries and encourage them by giving promotions with proper trainings in order to uplift a knowledge-based society.

Keywords: *Public Librarians, Public Libraries in NCP, Public Library Staff, Sri Lanka*

INTRODUCTION

Today, information management is fast changing and growing with modern technology like android phone, ipad, etc. Information is what we know and information becomes knowledge. Unlike special libraries public libraries provide their service to the general public. students, researchers, professionals, readers, politicians, etc. So public libraries should identify the category of users and their information needs. Public librarians should provide correct information to the right person on the right time. This study is restricted to the public libraries in the Anuradhapura District of Sri Lanka. It assesses the present status while discussing the public librarians' role.

Definition of Public libraries

As defined in the IFLA /UNESCO (2001) guidelines for developing public libraries, a public library is an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and

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educational attainment. UNESCO public library manifesto 1994, describes the public library as the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the IFLA public library guidelines (2001), the qualities and required skills of public library staff can be defined as interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate positively with people, the ability to understand the needs of customers, the ability to co-operate with individuals and groups in the community, knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity knowledge of the material that forms the library's collection and the way to access them with an understanding of sympathy with the principles of public service, the ability to work with others in providing an effective library service, organizational skills, with the flexibility to identify and implement changes, teamwork and leadership skills, imagination, vision and openness to new ideas and practice, readiness to change methods of working to meet new situations, knowledge of information and communications technology as and when these change. There are numerous inherent shortcomings in the public library system as a result of this condition. Obviously financial resources are scarce. Lack of training opportunities has affected the knowledge and skills of the public library staff. Information sources have rarely gone beyond the printed medium. Information technology is still alien to most of the public libraries and attitudes of the public as well as the authorities are negative towards the public library service (Wijetunge, 2000).

Orke (1984) revealed that public library service as a non-compensatory undifferentiated and non-essential local government service. Public library service, unlike housing or education, is a service without market segmentation because most of the public benefits from it. Public library service like fire or police services, incurs costs, however, even though more revenue is generated from its users. This means that libraries need much more support and attention from customers to continue their service, compared with other services. According to the Vidanapathirana (1997) at present, public libraries do not come under a portfolio of a minister, but function under local authorities. Since there is no recognition as a mandatory service, the success or failures of these libraries depends on the financial status of the local authority and the attitudes of the members towards the library service. Wijethunga (2000) stated that Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA) should emphasize public libraries should be taken under the wing of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, under which most of the other libraries exist, so that there will be proper co-ordination between the non-formal education section of the ministry and the public library service. Public library services should be developed within a framework of national strategies for information and culture.

Public libraries in Anuradhapura District

Usually, public libraries offer their collections and services to all members of the community and the general public of a specific area, regardless of age, sex, religion, nationality, language, occupation, economic status, education level or social status (UNESCO, 2000). According to the North Central Province Library Services Board Library List in 2015, there are 34 public libraries in Anuradhapura district located at Anuradhapura, Madavachchiya, Rambewa, Kabithigollawa, Kahatagasdigiliya, Horowpothana, Kapugollawa, Galenbidunuwewa, Eppawala, Thalawa, Thabuththegama, Katiyawa, Kudanelubewa, Wijayapura, Nōchchiyagama, Gonapathirawa,

Kalawewa, Mihinthale, Thirappane, Kakirawa, Maradankadawala, Madatugama, Habarana, Palugaswewa, Pubbogama, Adiyagala, Puttlum Junction, 5th Post, Nagmpaha, Galnewa, Alayalpaththuwa, Labunoruwa, Padaviya and Rajanganaya.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In this paper, the objectives of this research are;

- To understand the current status of the public library in the Anuradhapura District
- To identify Public librarians' responsibilities

METHODOLOGY

The researcher selected thirty four (34) public libraries in Anuradhapura district (Library Service Board, NCP, 2015). Two (02) of them remained closed during the data collection period (Kalawewa public library and Kapugollawa public library). Survey instrument was used to collect data from the public libraries. Structured questionnaires were distributed among the public library managerial staff to collect data. Researcher personally visited and collected the data through a duly filled questionnaire by conducting in-depth interviews with public library managerial staff from each library. Microsoft excels calculations were used to analyze data. All selected public libraries (100%) except the two closed libraries responded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the Thirty four (34) libraries in the Anuradhapura district, two (02) libraries remained closed during data collection period. One public library in Anuradhapura town is managed by the Anuradhapura Municipal Council and other thirty one (31) public libraries are managed by local government authorities. Analyzed data revealed that the managerial position of the public libraries included the Librarian, Library Assistant, Library Attendant, Labour (Marga Kamkaru), Office Assistant and Library Owner.

Table 1: Public Library managerial positions in Anuradhapura district

Managerial Staff Category	QTY	%
Librarian grade	6	19%
Library Assistant	15	47%
Library Attendant	3	9%
Labour (MargaKamkaru)	6	19%
Library Owner	1	3%
Office Assistant	1	3%
Total	32	100%

The above table shows that forty seven percent (47%) of public libraries in Anuradhapura District are managed by Library Assistants and nineteen percent (19%) of public libraries are managed by Labours called Marga Kamkaru. Also, same nineteen percent (19%) are managed by Librarians. Rest of the staff categories managed the public libraries accounting for fifteen percent (15%).

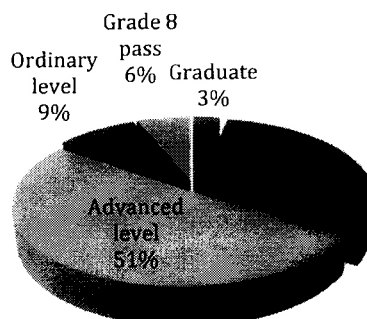


Figure 2: Educational Qualification of the public Library Management Staff

The above graph shows fifty one percent (51%) of library staff members having G.C. E Advanced level qualification manage their libraries. In addition thirty one percent (31%) of library staff members has obtained the diploma in Library and Information Science qualification whereas the other fifteen percent (15%) of library staff members having G.C.E Ordinary Level qualification and Grade 8 pass qualification manage their libraries. It is especially mentioned that only three percent (3%) of Library Assistants are graduates who manage their libraries and they are considered as substantially accepted qualified persons. According to the years of experience, the descriptions are listed as follows.

Table 3: Manegirial Library Staff Experience

Staff Category	Year of Experience					
	1 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 20	20 to 25	25 <
Librarian grade	0	1	1	0	0	4
Library Assistant	6	7	2	0	0	0
Library Attendant	1	1	1	0	0	0
Labour	2	1	2	1	0	0
Library Owner	1	0	0	0	0	0
office Assistant	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	11	10	6	1	0	4

According to the above table, it was found that only four librarians had more than twenty five (25) years of experience, of these, most of them were advanced level qualified persons. Only one library staff member was categorized under the level of 16-20 years. Under the category of 11-15 years, there were six (6) library staff members and ten (10) members had experience under the category of 6-10 years. Under the category of 1-5 years, there were eleven (11) library staff members. Especially, this research revealed that most of public library managerial staff had more than 5 years' experience in their position amounting to twenty one (21).

According to the table mentioned below, the age level of the particular public library managerial staff is as follows:

Table 4: Age Level of the Public Library Managerial Staff

Age group	Numbers	%
18-29	5	16%
30-39	14	44%
40-49	8	25%
50-60	5	16%
Total	32	100%

Forty four percent (44%) of Public Library managerial staff were in the age range of 30-39 years and forty one percent (41%) of them were in the age ranges of 40-49 and 50-60 years. As public library managerial persons, their responsibilities were to open and close their library at due time cleaning the library, maintaining the library stocks, maintaining the library acquisition register, etc. Most of them did not have a completed acquisition register; they had to gain knowledge to prepare it. Labour category staff members had not received a proper training in the library administration. By experience, they carry out day-to-day work. In most of the libraries, the library staff did not involve in the books selection procedure. The Secretary to the local government authority (LGAs) or development officers of LGAs selected the library books and other resources to the library. But the Municipal Council Library is using the on-line library management software called "KOHA". Five or six other libraries are using computers. Library Services Board of North Central Province is conducting training programs to develop the competencies of their public library staff. Fifteen percent (15%) of libraries have not developed in the annual stock because they did not have annual statutory financial allocations by NCP or any government / private institution.

FINDINGS

IFLA public library guidelines (2001) define library position/categories in public libraries as Qualified Librarians, Library Assistants, Specialist Staff, and Support Staff. But fifty percent (50%) of the Anuradhapura public libraries were managed by Library Assistants. Most of them had advanced level qualifications and 19% of public libraries in the area was managed by less qualified persons called Marga Kamkaru. They had grade 8 pass qualification with much experience. And only six staff members were in a Librarian position. Sixty percent (60%) of libraries had one or two staff members who run libraries with their own knowledge. Ninety percent (90%) of public library staff members were unsatisfied with their profession because job insecurity lack of knowledge, job involvement, job un-satisfaction and non-promotion. Twenty two percent (22%) of Libraries had only one staff member and if he or she was on leave or went to another program, the library was closed. There was no recruited or promoted public library staff within the last 15 years in the North Central Province.

Seventy percent (70%) of Public library staff members performed their duties and maintained library stock, but there was no development in the library or library profession. One or two times per year, they attend training programs organized by Library and Documentation Services Board or Library Services Board, NCP. But they did not get any respect from the authorities of the respective area. Again, they were doing their daily work because the authorities of local government did not recognize the public libraries. Forty percent (40%) of libraries did not use any cataloguing or classification system for their collection because of the lack of knowledge by library

staff. The public library staff members liked to learn, develop the library by gaining knowledge but there was no identified responsible authority to motivate or encourage them.

CONCLUSIONS

There are thirty four (34) public libraries functioning in the Anuradhapura District. Public libraries in this district are managed by local government authorities except the Anuradhapura Municipal Council Public Library. The majority of public libraries are managed by Library Assistants. Others have been managed by less qualified persons called marga kamkaru. Government authorities or Local government authorities are reluctant to get any action to build up or develop public libraries efficiently and effectively. Public library professionals have much experience but development of the library in the area is lacking. Library Services Board of NCP is organizing training program for them to gain professional knowledge annually. Public library professionals try to adopt new changes to their libraries but, lack of funds, lack of infrastructure and administration power are the barriers. A few libraries had one or two computers but operating knowledge is an obstacle and no Internet facility to access the users for information. Public library professionals in the area are unsatisfied with their job due to their long working positions without any promotion during the last fifteen (15) year period.

SUGGESTIONS

Government authorities and Library and Documentation Services board need to get directly involved and prepare national policy for the public libraries and develop them. Wijetunge (2000) recommended that Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA) as the sole professional body should authenticate a representation to the government authorities and policy makers on behalf of the public libraries. Local government authorities have a responsibility to develop the public libraries in their area because public libraries are under their wings. It is also recommended that Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government Authorities of Sri Lanka Central Government should directly involve and analyze the situation and prepare a rationalized policy to develop the public libraries in Sri Lanka.

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